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MODERN DRAMATISTS

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MODERN DRAMATISTS

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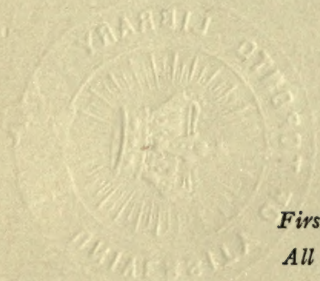

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MODERN DRAMATISTS

I

INTRODUCTORY

This book aims at a critical study of the modern European Theatre. It is not intended as a guide to the popular authors of the day, either in England or abroad; indeed, many successful playwrights are not even mentioned in its pages. It is dogmatic, because it is written from a definite standpoint, and its judgments depend upon an absolute standard of value. To write of any group of authors, dramatic or otherwise, without such a standard, is to debase the coinage of criticism and to insult the artist. I need not define my criterion here, for I have endeavoured to make it clear in the opening chapters. It is enough to say that it excludes the vast majority of living dramatic authors, and that in excluding

them it is justified by the verdict even of our own time. In general it may be said that only the pioneer or "modern" dramatists achieve a European reputation. Ibsen, Björnson, Hauptmann, Wedekind, Strindberg, Maeterlinck, Gorky, D'Annunzio, Schnitzler, and Hofmannsthal, for example, are at least well known by name in England, while equally successful authors, like Paul Lindau, Ludwig Fulda, Paul Hervieu, Henri Bernstein and Hermann Bahr either remain unknown or only attain a passing vogue through adaptations of their work for the West End stage. In the same way the German Theatre has recognised Bernard Shaw, but appears almost unaware of the existence of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones. There are of course exceptions to the rule, and a European reputation is not an infallible guide. Sudermann has in reality no more claim to rank among the moderns than Sir Arthur Pinero, and he has only been included in this book because it is intended in the first instance for English readers, who have been accustomed to

place him with Hauptmann and Wedekind as a representative German dramatist. In this instance, as in some others, criticism must necessarily be intolerant and polemical. Tolerance smoothes the way of life, but it is the most insidious enemy of art. It spells compromise, and compromise and criticism cannot be on speaking terms.

If these critical studies, however, show little respect for persons, it is because they are written with the greater respect for the Theatre. And at a time like the present, when the English Theatre in particular is endeavouring to grope its way into touch with art and with life, to escape from the contempt in which it has justly been held by the literary artists of many generations, and, although harassed both by its enemies and by some of its friends, to build up a new national drama, it may be of service to compare its achievement with that of other theatres abroad. The conditions are different, but the task of the dramatist remains the same. European drama has just reached the end of an odd and experimental, but stirring, period of

artistic history—a period of "schools," in which every playwright has been compelled to bear a label and to be described as naturalist or symbolist, realist or romantic. These labels are irksome to the artist, and we are learning to distrust them, for the differences that they represent are often only superficial. So much has been gained by these thirty years of discussion. "Naturalism," for example, is dead. It was never naturalistic. The greatest works that it produced were always symmetrical in form, rhythmic, and selective. Symbolism, realism, romanticism, each has a hundred meanings. Everything finely imagined is of necessity real, and everything real is a symbol. There is no place for the irrelevantly real in the drama or in any other art. If these descriptive terms are applied to the work of the modern dramatists with whom I have dealt, they are used only as convenient approximations, and must be taken as such. They have no exact definition. It is possible that an author may be so misguided as to sit down and say: "I will write a realistic masterpiece" or "I will

write a symbolic masterpiece." It is even possible that he and his readers may be convinced of the realism or the symbolism, but actually the work, if it is a work of art, will be individual and indefinable. It will be simply the expression of a personality through the medium of a craft. If the craft fails, the personality may be distorted; but if the personality fails, the craft is useless. The great need of the Theatre, then, is not conformity to this school or to that, but the service of writers who are at once free spirits and good workmen. Freedom is their own possession, but good workmanship can be learned in some measure from the masters. Among the modern dramatists discussed here, some are master craftsmen, and others are first of all poets and thinkers. I have tried, therefore, to give something more than a mere description of their plays, and to make clear in each instance the personality of the author and the meaning of his work.

II

MODERNITY AND THE DRAMATIST

No word has been more abused or less understood than the word "modernity." To those who are content with the half-truth that there is nothing new under the sun, the continual controversy aroused by what are called "new," "advanced," or "modern" artistic movements may well appear a waste of breath. In reality, however, modernity has little to do with the calendar. It may be studied in every period. In art, as in religion and statecraft, there must always be a conflict of parties. The names of the parties and their watchwords may be new, but the realities for which they stand are as old as art itself.

In religion and politics the issues of the struggle are perhaps more clearly defined, because they touch, or appear to touch,

the life of the individual citizen more closely. But the conflict is no less real in art because the parties are so loosely grouped and so highly individual in their tendency. Indeed, it is more real, for personal conviction is the driving force rather than the party machine. In any case, the broad division is always between old forms and new, between conservatives and revolutionists, classical tradition and new impulse, academism and modernity. The individual patron of art must choose between them as his own temperament dictates. On the one hand, he is offered the work of a certain number of artists, whether painters or musicians, novelists or dramatists or poets, as representing a fixed standard of value and an established tradition ; on the other, that of the moderns who are striving for a hearing.

The choice is complicated by the apparently paradoxical fact that the advanced artists of one generation tend to be accepted and academised by the next. Among the authors of the nineteenth century, for example, Carlyle, Shelley, Swinburne and Meredith in

England, Goethe and Schiller in Germany, Victor Hugo in France, and even such clearly defined "moderns" as Ibsen and Nietzsche have all moved, or are steadily in process of moving, into their places among the classics. By constant repetition of their names, as much as by real recognition of the value of their work, they join the same established tradition against which they themselves fought. True, there is no coherence in the tradition. It includes born academists and born revolutionaries alike, but they join it none the less, simply by virtue of having lived, having written and achieved fame. University professors look upon them benignantly, and prepare lecture courses upon their works; essayists begin to estimate "the verdict of posterity"; they pass out of copyright and into cheap reprints of the classics, and their names fortify the academic citadel. The same fate is in store for some authors of the present day. Their modernity is a passing phase, and yet an eternal reality.

The question then arises, What is pre-

cisely the hall-mark of modernity? What is it that distinguishes modern dramatists, modern novelists, modern poets, from the mob of dramatists, novelists, and poets of their own period? The answer is clear enough. It is simply that they are in touch with, or in advance of, the thought of their own time; that their work breaks new paths, offers new forms and modes of expression; that the men and women they create do not merely reflect the conditions under which they live and the spirit of their age, but are dynamic, developing, continually offering a criticism of those conditions, and so projecting themselves into the future and making history.

Upon the title-page of Hauptmann's "Einsame Menschen" are the words, "I dedicate this drama to those who have lived it." Applied to anything but a work of art, such dedication would be an impertinence, even though the play had been lived a thousand times, and every word were taken direct from the lips of its characters. The mere fact of being is no sufficient justification for treatment in literature or upon the stage. A work of

art must stand in a more intimate relation to life. It must be, not imitative, but selective. It must interpret as well as describe. Its aim is the creation of an atmosphere in which tragedy is no longer without meaning, and in which comedy and the comic spirit can fulfil their destiny as critics of the passing show. Above all, the persons of the drama must be engaged not only in being, but becoming. The final curtain must see them changed. Both they and the audience must have learnt something. The Germans have a name for these moderns. They are the *Uebergangsmenschen einer Uebergangszeit*, the transition men of a transition period, the bridge between yesterday and to-morrow. In one of his prefaces the Swedish dramatist Strindberg writes :—

> As modern men and women, living in a time of transition, a time hastier, more hysterical perhaps, than its immediate predecessor, I have drawn my characters often vacillating, torn between old and new. They are compounded of past and present opinions and standards, scraps of books and newspaper cuttings, fragments

> of men, torn shreds of holiday attire that now are rags, for this is how the soul itself is patched together.

Modernity, however, does not necessarily depend upon modern subject-matter. Strindberg himself, like many other dramatists, began by outlining a philosophical problem in a historical drama ("Meister Olof"). If Bernard Shaw had written no other plays than his "Cæsar and Cleopatra," "The Devil's Disciple," and "The Man of Destiny," he would stil be distinctively a modern author as compared with, say, Sir Arthur Pinero. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who has hitherto based most of his plays either upon the tragic legends of Greece or the Italian Renaissance period, is clearly more of a "modern" than Sudermann, who writes of present-day Germany.

Nor is modernity necessarily connected with realism, any more than classical academism is necessarily connected with romance. It is true that many modern authors, and especially many modern dramatists, belong to the so-called realistic school, but this is due, as will be

seen later, to special circumstances, in particular to the influence of Ibsen on form and to a reaction against the gross romanticism of the existing theatre. That reaction has not yet spent its force, and it is aided by the revolutionary social dramatists (as opposed to the "society" dramatists) who use the theatre deliberately to secure the most vivid representation of social injustice, and so fling down their challenge to the present order, conceiving the realistic method as the only means of substituting truth for falsehood. Realism is, indeed, for these authors, their contribution to the revolutionary movement on its destructive side and their way of unmasking social shams. For them the cry of "Truth!" is the tally-ho which sets them in pursuit of the actual, the existing fact. Whether the next phase of modernity in the theatre will be a further movement towards this actuality or a new romantic renascence it is as yet impossible to say. Ibsen marked not only the beginning, but the close, of a period. He was the great destroyer, yet his dramatic form is unsurpassed. Those of his followers

who have set out to portray the actual have for the most part only echoed his cry of "Truth!" in a minor key. Yet he and they have helped to find a place for realism in the academic tradition, and against that tradition the new movement of the future will have to make its way.

The word "modern," then, covers a multitude of virtues and at least a fair sprinkling of sins. It is a convenient weapon for the younger generation, often hard pressed for an adjective broad enough to embrace all its vaguer aspirations, a bludgeon wherewith to belabour the out of date, a dagger ever ready to prick the bubble of academism. But if it is a word hard of definition, the word "dramatist" is harder still. For it is not enough that a dramatist should be an artist with something definite to say in dialogue form: he must be prepared to say it in the theatre. Nor is it enough that he should merely write for the theatre: he must accept a certain highly restricted yet highly effective mode of expression, and must be able to handle his characters properly for stage purposes. These are no abstract,

academic rules of dramaturgy; they are the absolute necessities of his art, as much a part of his stock in trade as the painter's brush and canvas. If he quarrels with these conditions, he must seek another form than drama. For the theatre is a hard taskmaster. It is the most impressionist of all mediums, a place of broad tones and splashes of high colour, of rapid movement and treacherous, pinnacled moments, its audience sensitive and impatient as only the crowd can be. It is intolerant of rhetoric, and its subtleties are not the subtleties of literature.

There is no absolute standard of technical form, in spite of the dramaturgists. All academic attempts at defining the dramatist's limitations may be destroyed by a new work of genius. But at the same time absolute freedom of form is unthinkable. One test only is decisive, the test of success, not in the sense of popularity or box-office returns, but of real effectiveness. If a dramatist discovers or adopts a form which really enables him to convey to his audience just what he wants to convey within the two or three hours

at his disposal, he has justified that form for himself. It may not suit other writers; it is pretty sure not to suit his academic critics. But it is his form. It has set up a fair means of communication between him and his audience, and it is invulnerable. Only, the audience must be the arbiter, not the author. No matter how confident he may be that his dialogues are plays, no matter how often he repeats the assertion, the only final test of its truth can be the fall of the final curtain upon a clear, sustained impression of dramatic power.

The dramatist is distinguished, then, partly by an instinctive understanding of these conditions and partly by a deliberate choice of them. Compare, for example, Shelley's "The Cenci" and "Prometheus Unbound" with Ibsen's "Brand" or "Peer Gynt." They are all in a sense plays; they are all in verse and in dialogue form. "The Cenci" was written with a view to performance, and it has been produced. "Peer Gynt" and "Brand" are both extremely difficult plays for stage purposes. Yet it is not too much to say

that even if Ibsen had never written his prose dramas "Peer Gynt" and "Brand" would have marked him distinctively as a dramatist, while if Shelley had never written any verse but that contained in "Prometheus" and "The Cenci" he would still be first and foremost a poet. The difference lies in Ibsen's possession of the special dramatic sense, and in his use of verse as a means to a dramatic end. Poets seldom take the Theatre seriously. This is perhaps hardly to be wondered at, for the Theatre seldom takes them seriously, and it requires either an all-compelling instinct or an heroic effort of will to bring the poet to write for the stage, especially for a stage which has lost its finer traditions. Hence the appalling state of affairs in the English Theatre during almost the whole of the nineteenth century, and especially during the later Victorian period. The greater artists ignored the Theatre, and it was delivered over to the minor playwright specialists, most of them craftsmen with a good average sense of dramatic effect, but not one of them capable of giving new life

or new form to the drama, or indeed of doing anything but satisfy the existing popular taste. Against Meredith, Swinburne, and Hardy the Theatre could only offer Robertson, Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, Captain Marshall, and the rest. Oscar Wilde appeared meteoric among these stars of the tenth magnitude. "Atalanta in Calydon" was not for such a stage as this, and the incomparable scenes of "The Egoist," full of dramatic sense as they were, took shape as "a comedy in narrative."

This distrust of the limitations of the Theatre still remains, and it accounts for the partial failure of so many modern dramatists. Comparatively few of them combine originality of thought with technical skill. Their scorn of tradition in ideas leads them to a scorn of the medium which they themselves elect to use, and so it is that the second-rate dramatists are often the ablest craftsmen; that, having least to say, they know how to say it most effectively. The continual struggle between the exuberant flow of ideas and the form into which they are to

be cast can be traced, sentence by sentence, in the work of most moderns of the first rank, and the result is the flood of "study plays," written by dramatists so bent upon emancipation that they have emancipated themselves at length from the Theatre. The effect of this disregard of form is in every way disastrous. It strengthens the resistance of the present Theatre to new ideas, it leads the modernity movement on a false scent, and it is of no service either to literature or drama. The unplayable play, bereft of an audience, creates a cult; and modernity is overrun with cults. At best they can only be tentative; they have none of the sweeping force of a real renaissance.

We have two standards, then, by which to judge the work of the modern dramatists. The first is distinction of thought, and the second service to the Theatre. Other considerations, such as service to literature or beauty, must be subordinate, for these qualities develop of themselves in the work of a dramatist who is at once completely the master of his subject and whole-heartedly the servant of

his art. Beauty is least often attained when it is most eagerly striven after. The ancient rule of the craftsman applies to drama, as to the other arts. The maker must first see to it that his work shall be fit for use; that the cup he fashions shall be a good cup, well made for wine; that the fabric he weaves shall be strong and supple for the wearer, the house built for a dwelling and the lamp for light. Then, if he is also an artist, all of these will be beautiful. But if he sets out first in pursuit of the abstraction beauty, he is likely to fail in his purpose, so that the vessel he creates is without form and useless. This is true, especially in the Theatre, of all other abstractions, such as intellect or politics or wit. These are only the means of drama, and not the end.

III

THE INFLUENCE OF IBSEN

All attempts at discovering the exact origin of the modern movement in the Theatre must in a measure fail. It cannot be traced to any one author, or to any one current in philosophy or event in history or politics. Being modern, it is necessarily a product of all of these together. Ibsen was doubtless the greatest personal influence, but he himself only gave dramatic form and force to already existing ideas, and no one can say how far he was indebted to the conditions of his time. A century before him Jean Jacques Rousseau had set a feudal world talking of "rights" and freedom, and the first French Revolution, although a set-back politically, was no final defeat of democracy. Statecraft became more infused with theory, and the wars of the early nineteenth century took on a new social aspect that dis-

tinguished them from the old bellicose escapades. 1848, the year of revolutions abroad and of Chartism in England, showed the progress of Communist ideas among the rebels, and here, as in the case of the later Paris Commune, there was scarcely a poet or thinker in Europe who did not openly take one side or the other. Swinburne's "Songs before Sunrise" belong to this period; Ibsen himself was strongly influenced by the failure of the Commune, and it was the text of many of his pronouncements on "the rule of the mob." Quite independently of him, Strindberg, who began his work in 1870, formulated his first long play, "Meister Olof," a historical drama, to represent a philosophical struggle, in which one of the characters stands for the revolutionary ideas of the time. It was inevitable that the Theatre should reflect this intellectual unrest. Indeed, it is extraordinary that it did not begin to do so earlier, and that amid the stormy realities of 1845 to 1880 in France the stage should have been monopolised by the artificial society drama. The stage of other countries

was in much the same condition, and no clearer proof could be given of the decadence of the Theatre. In a time of real artistic vitality art leads the way through its power of eliminating all that is irrelevant and of giving the most vivid expression possible to real issues. When it lags behind religion and science, and ignores the conflicts of daily life, it is moribund. Ibsen and his followers, then, had to make their way against the dullest and most disheartening of all reactionary influences—the contempt of their own medium of expression and the disrepute in which it was held. The history of that conflict is the history of Ibsen's own life and the motive of his plays.

Ibsen's prose dramas would probably have conquered the Theatre almost without an effort if they had only had to contend with romanticism of the type of the Danish dramatist Oehlenschläger, then popular in Scandinavia. But some progress had already been made toward a certain type of realism. The well-made play, such as "La Dame aux Camélias," with all its bad ethics, was at least capable of

producing an effective stage illusion. It represented realism for the *demi-monde* and for the upper classes, and it founded quite a definite school, which soon took possession of the commercial Theatre. The "moderns" like Dumas, had nothing of particular value to offer beside construction, and even that was mechanical, the more apparently mechanical because of their poverty of subject-matter. But Ibsen was not above learning his craft from the French. The climax of "An Enemy of the People" or "The Pillars of Society" has just the same form as the climax of the brief fourth act of "La Dame aux Camélias." In his earlier plays Ibsen adopted the Dumas form, transfused it, and sent it back to France *minus* the soliloquy and other improbabilities. There, in its newer form, it persists, for France is still the chief manufactory of the well-made play.

The machinery of Ibsen's work, then, was the old machinery, but the drama built upon it was entirely new. There are still famous actresses who play Marguerite Gautier in "La Dame aux

Camélias" one evening and Rebecca West in "Rosmersholm" the next. But the difference between the two women cannot be estimated in the period of thirty years or so between the appearance of the plays. There are centuries between them. They live in different worlds. Ibsen only used the form of the French society drama in order to embody in it a new social drama of his own. In place of the marionettes of the comedy of manners, he used the living figures of the Norwegian *bourgeoisie*. For this he suffered the penalty of being named "suburban" by a London critic. This egregious comment illustrates very well the condition of the Theatre and its standards when Ibsen began to write. The one essential for the dramatist was that he should write of good society, and, as he was generally an ex-actor without any first-hand knowledge of his subject, the picture was ludicrous enough.

Gentility is still the popular standard in the Theatre, but in 1870, except for the classic poets, it was universal. Ibsen substituted for the test of income and

good breeding that of distinction and personality. Intellectually the characters of the society drama were not even suburban. They were inhabitants of a well-appointed desert. It is the triumph of Ibsen that by contrast with his ship-owners, doctors, journalists, tradesmen, and master builders, and, above all, beside his group of women, they appear as such. Marguerite Gautier needed every theatrical device of the playwright to make her even momentarily real, but Nora and Rebecca West can bear the light of day. Ibsen did not merely preach an intellectual aristocracy: he created it.

Yet he achieved all this, like a good craftsman, directly through the medium of the Theatre. He did not despise his tools. His plays make a colossal demand upon the art of the actor and the intelligence of the audience, but once those demands are granted—that is to say, under the best conditions conceivable—a perfect communication is set up, and the hearer is never distracted by irrelevancies. He did not write explanatory prefaces, and was slow to discuss his own work.

Whatever his critics or his followers did, he never deduced any coherent philosophy from it. Body-snatching interpretation was no part of his purpose. His descriptive notes are the baldest outline. Bernard Shaw has lamented this, but it appears in keeping with Ibsen's contempt for the superfluous sentence. His plays were for the Theatre, and he offered no stage directions for a blush. His characters were for the stage, fresh from the dressing-room, and though he might concede them a beard and frock-coat, he forbore to burden them with a page of family history or a guide to the politics or topography of the district. And so it is with the plays themselves. They have been analysed, searched for philosophies and political creeds, weighed, labelled, and compared, but they survive the ordeal. They stand out complete and final. The critic and the appreciator have done their work as intermediaries, and the issue may be left between Ibsen and his audience.

We must pass now from the beginning of Ibsen's work to the end, for it was not until most of his plays were already

finished that his influence began to be felt. This is perhaps not as strange as it seems, for France had established what was virtually a monopoly of drama. Germany followed France at some distance, and most of the English playwrights were engaged in adapting from the French, so that the intrusion of a new dramatist from Norway was not only unexpected, but conflicted with all the established interests of the Theatre. The result, when once the new force was understood, was the "Ibsenite controversy."

That controversy (if the clash of prejudice and logical conviction may so be called) is long since dead. No one now cares what the *Daily Telegraph* or the *Referee* thought about "Ghosts" or "Hedda Gabler" in 1891, and if their criticism survives, it is only because it has been pilloried as a journalistic curiosity in the essays of Bernard Shaw. Of all European countries England is least sensitive to new impressions from without, and the prejudice was perhaps more stupid here than elsewhere. The squabble had little to do directly with the Theatre, for

the controversialists on both sides were altogether obsessed with Ibsen's morals. They were engaged either in piecing together a philosophy from his works, or in attempting to expose his depravity.

As far as morality is concerned, Ibsen answered his critics much better than any of his supporters could answer them, and that without adding one word to his plays themselves. He had created fine men and women—above all, honest men and women, seeking for realities—while the playwrights of his day were living in an atmosphere of half-truths and shams, grubbing in the divorce court and living upon the maintenance of social intrigue just as comfortably as any bully upon the earnings of a prostitute. This is indeed the only answer to the cry of "immorality," for if any person prefers the contemporary heroine of popular drama to Nora and Rebecca West, or the contemporary hero to Dr. Stockmann, all the arguments of the Ibsenite apologists will be wasted upon him. Moreover, the supreme test of the artist is the revelation of himself in his work, not as an obtrusive personality,

but as a living, human force behind it all. Behind the work of all the popular playwrights of the period, from Dumas fils and Sardou to Paul Lindau, Robertson and Pinero, there is at best only technical skill and intellectual commonplace; while behind each of the plays of Ibsen there is a great personality.

Josef Hofmiller has said of Ibsen in his volume of essays "Zeitgenossen" (Munich, 1910):—

> His individuality was so powerful that it well-nigh shattered the vessel of his art. . . . The fabulous clings about the man and his work like a breath of ancient sagas. At the root of all his plays lies the immeasurable. Their essence remains Protean, beyond expression and beyond our grasp. They slip from beneath our hand, stating problems rather than solving them, pointing this way and that, perplexing as old, old riddles. . . .
>
> Bury him with princely honours, this dead poet, and lay three things upon his bier:
>
> A crown, a hammer, and a sword!

This was the influence, then, under which the advanced Theatre of Europe

came between the years 1885 and 1890. Appropriately enough, France was the first country to respond, although its response has proved hitherto the least sustained. The Théâtre Libre was established in Paris by M. Antoine in 1887, and its watchword from the first was "naturalism." This word was intended to cover the dramatic method of Zola, Strindberg, Tolstoi, and other writers generally known as "realists," and the theatre was founded originally to produce their work rather than that of Ibsen, who was as yet scarcely known in France. Strindberg, however, in an essay written at the time of the production of his own plays by the Théâtre Libre, distinguishes carefully between "naturalism" and "realism" as follows:—

> Photography includes everything, even the speck of dust upon the lens of the camera. This is the spirit of realism, a method latterly exalted to an art, an art that cannot see the wood for the trees. It is mistaken naturalism, believing that art consists merely in taking a piece of nature and drawing it in a natural way. But this

> is not true naturalism. The true, the great naturalism seeks out those points in life where the greatest conflicts occur. It loves to see what is not to be seen every day. It rejoices in the battle of elemental powers, whether they be called love or hatred, noble or revolting instincts. It cares not whether they be beautiful or ugly, so that they be only great. . . . Let us have a theatre where we can be shocked by what is horrible, where we can laugh at what is laughable, where we can see life without shrinking back in terror if what has hitherto lain veiled behind theological or æsthetic preconceptions be suddenly revealed to us. Let us have a free theatre, where there is room for everything but incompetence, hypocrisy, and stupidity.

It was in this conception of a free theatre, untrammelled and unconventional, that the new movement crystallised. The Théâtre Libre itself began on a small scale as a subscription stage with semi-private performances, and it thus had the enormous artistic advantage (however doubtful financially) of choosing its own audience, while at the same time it avoided any kind of censorship.

Invitation cards were issued as if for an evening party or *salon* :—

THÉÂTRE LIBRE.

MM. X—— and Y—— (the authors) have the honour to invite you to be present at the production of —— on Monday evening next, at eight o'clock.

R. S. V. P.

In spite of these limitations, its appearance made a great stir. The early performances included Tolstoi's "Powers of Darkness" and Strindberg's "The Father," "Miss Julia," and "Creditors." Among the new plays by French authors were "Blanchette," by Brieux, and "L'Argent," by Emile Fabre. Ibsen's "Ghosts" ("Les Revenants") was soon given, and afterwards a number of his other plays meeting the "naturalistic" demand. Innovations in lighting and stage management made the illusion of reality more vivid. A number of one-act plays were produced, some of them incidental *tours de force* quite unworthy of the Theatre. But upon the whole M. Antoine's management was a valuable

as well as a stirring adventure. It lasted eight years, and it leaves a reminiscent trail at least in the name of the Théâtre Antoine.

It was only to be expected that in Paris, the home of artistic "secessions" and cults, other rival advanced theatres should spring up. Among them were the Théâtre d'Art and the Théâtre de l'Œuvre, and at these again the three Strindberg plays mentioned above were produced. The Théâtre de l'Œuvre, founded in 1893 by M. Lugné Poë, became identified with a new symbolist movement through the early plays of Maeterlinck. As this reaction, however, was only indirectly due to Ibsen's influence, it must be dealt with later.

Meanwhile Germany, too, had established its "free theatre" in the Berlin Freie Bühne (1889), under the direction of Dr. Otto Brahm. Its first production was Ibsen's "Ghosts" ("Gespenster"). This created what is known in Germany as a Theaterskandal—a term which covers anything from an actual riot on the first night to a violent newspaper discussion.

In the case of "Ghosts" the performance passed off peacefully enough, but the excitement remained, and it was renewed a month later, when Gerhart Hauptmann's "Vor Sonnenaufgang" ("Before Sunrise") was given. This was not only Hauptmann's first play, but the first of the naturalistic school in Germany. The time was well chosen for the foundation of the Freie Bühne. Ibsen and naturalism were everywhere discussed; Darwinism, Comtism and free thought were in their first bloom as popular philosophies; 1848 and Republicanism were still a living memory; and Social Democracy was beginning to feel its strength. The new theatre was for the drama springing from all of these, and it at once took on the aspect of a revolutionary social force. As for its repertory, it followed much the same lines as the Parisian Théâtre Libre. Strindberg's "Fräulein Julie" was given, with other translations from the Swedish and Russian. Beside Hauptmann, Max Halbe and Otto Erich Hartleben came forward with original work of their own. But there soon proved to be little need of

the Freie Bühne except for the purpose of producing exceptional or prohibited plays, and this other societies could do just as well. The Freie Bühne had one great advantage over the Théâtre Libre—the support of the provinces. As far as the Theatre is concerned, Paris is France; and the audience of the new French dramatists was necessarily limited, so that indeed they could only afford to write for the Théâtre Libre at a real sacrifice to themselves. But Germany was, and is, provided with all the machinery of production in the shape of innumerable repertory theatres, subsidised and unsubsidised, scattered through all its great cities. The plays of the new Freie Bühne authors were at once taken up by these theatres and produced. Hauptmann's third play, "Einsame Menschen" ("Lonely Lives"), was accepted by the Deutsches Theater in Berlin. Max Halbe's "Jugend" has had more than two hundred performances at the Munich Schauspielhaus alone, and the number must have reached several thousand in the whole of Germany. After the Freie

Bühne had given him his opportunity in "Angele" and "Der Frosch" Otto Erich Hartleben wrote "Rosenmontag," one of the most successful plays of the time. Ibsen and Strindberg, too, passed into the repertory of the provincial theatres. All obstacles vanished, and the pioneer stage of the Freie Bühne became a triumphal progress. Modernity was the fashion.

The mere vogue passed, but once the moderns had obtained a footing, they could not be ousted. Germany is the paradise of the playwright. If it is not the country of highest dramatic achievement, it is at least that of the greatest opportunities.

Of the third venture established under the Ibsen influence, the Independent Theatre of London, there is a sadly different tale to tell. It began, under the direction of Mr. J. T. Grein, in 1891, and once again "Ghosts" was the first play to be produced. This was followed by Zola's "Thérèse Raquin," and in 1892 by Bernard Shaw's "Widowers' Houses." Mr. Shaw has described the career of the Independent Theatre inimitably in his preface to the first volume of "Plays

Pleasant and Unpleasant," and indeed its only claim to distinction is that it was his discoverer. The theatre was neither as advanced as the Théâtre Libre nor as efficient as the Freie Bühne. It represented a movement which not only had no support in the provinces, but very little in playgoing London. It was a curiosity, and little more. Nevertheless the production of "Widowers' Houses" made dramatic history, and among the new playwrights born of the "free" theatres of the 1890 period Bernard Shaw has proved a greater individual force than either Brieux in France or Hauptmann in Germany. His plays supplied a motive for the foundation of the Stage Society (the lineal descendant of the Independent Theatre) in 1899, and of the Court Theatre, under the Vedrenne-Barker management, (1904–7). Most of the "modern" English dramatists were first played by one or other of these theatres.

The Independent Theatre soon disappeared, partly because of the dearth of original plays by English authors and partly because it had no monopoly of

Ibsen. "A Doll's House" was first played by Mr. Charles Charrington and Miss Janet Achurch in 1889, and from then until 1897 short runs or isolated performances of "Pillars of Society," "Hedda Gabler," "Rosmersholm," and the other social dramas were occasionally given in London, while "A Doll's House" made a tour of the colonies and the English-speaking world.

In other countries, notably in Russia and Italy, the "free theatre" as a separate institution was either unknown or only appeared spasmodically, but Ibsen's plays found their way into the ordinary repertory of stock companies, and especially of well-known actresses. Hedda Gabler, Nora and Rebecca West are great acting parts, and Eleanora Duse, Lydia Yavorskaia and others soon made them widely known. Much of Ibsen's influence was no doubt indirect; some advance would certainly have taken place without his aid; but that he was the chief inspiration of the new movement no one can possibly doubt.

So far we have only dealt with the effect of his work upon the pioneer theatres and

the dramatists who may properly be called modern. In the ordinary theatre it was almost as instantaneous. Soliloquies and "asides" practically disappeared as parts of constructive machinery, with enormous advantage to the stage illusion and indirectly to the playwright. This accounts for the curious fact that Ibsen's influence has created or increased the reputation of popular dramatists, semi-moderns like Sudermann and Pinero, Hervieu and Bernstein. These authors, without for the most part any burning ideas of their own, found expression ready to hand in the perfect technique of a master. There is no copyright in form, and plagiarism brings no dishonour. Moreover, the plagiarism was almost unconscious. They did no more than move with the times and adapt themselves to the needs of the public, as they had always done. They poured their own baser metal into Ibsen's mould, turning it out to appear, in the eyes of the boulevardian or the West End playgoer, uncommonly like the real article.

In every period there are such semi-

moderns. They serve, in a measure, to educate the public and to develop an audience. Writing, as one of them has said, with one eye upon art and the other upon the box-office, they manage to gain a comfortable living. They write genuinely effective plays with genuinely fine moments, for it is the first condition of their existence that they should be good craftsmen. Nevertheless there is no place for them among the modern dramatists, for their function in the Theatre at best is only to drift whither the moderns steer.

IV

SCANDINAVIA

BJÖRNSON AND STRINDBERG

Björnson

Ibsen compelled a hearing for the dramatic literature of Scandinavia, and Europe, looking thus perforce to Norway, discovered Björnson. It is possible that Björnson would have become known even without this especial notice, but his reputation would certainly have been made as a novelist, a publicist, an orator and politician, a fighter in the cause of peace, a poet and a statesman, rather than as a playwright. For Björnson was all of these. His life was a race of conflicting enthusiasms, and the Theatre was only one of them. For a few months or years the dramatist in him would rush to the front, only to be overtaken and passed by the poet or the pamphleteer. This headlong life was the essence of the man, but

it offered little enough serenity for the artist. Where Ibsen devoted two years to the writing of a play, Björnson gave at most a few months. While Ibsen was in his study in Christiania or Munich, Björnson was stumping Norway in the cause of freedom, issuing manifestoes, and arousing remote townships and villages with the tempestuous eagerness of a revivalist. This was a more human occupation than the slow composition of, let us say, "The Wild Duck." It made Björnson an actor in the world-drama of which Ibsen was first the spectator, and afterwards the playwright. There was, however, a curious parallel between the two men, from the early work of both as scenic managers in the theatres of Bergen and Christiania to their part in the emancipation of Norway and their leonine appearance and personality. Björnson's bias towards propagandism was temperamental. He was the son of a pastor, and although he soon rejected popular theology he was the most dogmatic of free-thinkers. If he had been born in England, he would have been an intermediary between Puritanism and art

—perhaps between Nonconformity and the Theatre. All who knew him are agreed as to this dominance of the pastor in Björnson. The platform was his pulpit; the political campaign his crusade.

Strindberg gives an account of a meeting with him in Paris which throws light upon Björnson's nature. Strindberg had refused several invitations to visit the poet, preferring, as he was in precarious health and busy with work of his own, not to come under the influence of so powerful a personality. One afternoon, returning from a stroll, he found Björnson awaiting him in his rooms, and he writes a note upon the interview in his diary: "Björnson spoke of politics and literature; of his doings in Norway and abroad. His energy was magnificent; his flow of words unceasing. But behind all his talk of affairs I saw only the priest addressing his flock; and behind the man himself only a great, good-natured child."

A curious intermixture of naïveté and perception appears in all Björnson's work. He wrote some twenty plays; as many, that is, in his dramatic interludes as Ibsen

wrote in a whole lifetime. His earlier writings, like Ibsen's, were chiefly historical and saga dramas. "Sigurd the Bastard," "Mary Stuart of Scotland," and "Sigurd the Crusader" were all finished before 1865. From 1868 to 1874 came a political period, and afterwards the plays of modern life, "The Editor," "Bankruptcy," "The New System," "Geography and Love," "A Gauntlet," and "Beyond Human Power." Several of these are topical comedies and satires, but two, "Bankruptcy" and "Beyond Human Power," stand out clearly as the best of Björnson's work for the stage. "Bankruptcy" is a half-social, half-domestic drama of the ruin of a great firm. It is in the repertory of most German theatres under the title "Ein Fallissement."

"Beyond Human Power" is in two parts, but only the first of these (in two acts) is generally played. This first part is a miracle play in a modern setting.

The scene is laid in a remote village in the North of Norway, where the midnight sun, the mountain storms and avalanches

help to create an atmosphere of other-worldliness and mystery. The pastor of this village is possessed of some strange healing powers which make him, in the eyes of the country people, almost a divine figure. By the laying on of hands he is able to cure cripples, and the sick for many miles round come to him for help. He is a man of simple faith, incapable of argument, and he accepts his powers without question as the gift of God. One person only he has never been able to heal: his wife. She is an invalid and a sceptic, and although she is in sympathy with him, knows him through and through, loves him and accepts his miracles, her will resists his influence. She cannot pray with him, and she lies all day upon her bed, unable to sleep and too weak even to move her limbs. When her husband comes to her each morning with the flowers that he has gathered, ready to fall upon his knees by her bedside, there is always a faint resistance in her welcome. All the power of her body has passed into her mind, and she keeps her individuality apart from his. The dramatic force of

the play lies in the opposition of these two wills, and in the effect of the miracles upon them. The development is extraordinary. At the end of each of the two acts the audience is shaken by a moment as intense as any in the whole history of drama.

The first moment is felt almost as a physical catastrophe. The pastor's wife lies sleepless, and her sister watches by her bedside while the pastor himself goes to the church to pray for her recovery. Suddenly a roar is heard, and from the window an avalanche is seen descending upon the church. It is turned aside by unseen power, and crashes harmlessly into the valley below. The watchers within the room rush to the bedside, and find the sick woman sleeping peacefully.

The second act: The fame of the pastor's miracles spreads fast, and a meeting of the presbyters of the church is summoned to consider them. Their conference leads to a striking scene. Among them are the man-of-the-world presbyter who finds miracles an offence against good taste, the bigot who considers them a breach of ecclesiastical discipline, the

sceptic in search of trickery, the theologian with a patent "reconciling" theory, the devout man perturbed by questionings, and the hungry vicar who has had nothing to eat all day, cannot understand what all the fuss is about, and is mainly concerned with the prospects of an early meal. Lastly, the unknown pastor who has come across the mountains, and bears witness of the miracle of the avalanche. The discussion grows violent. All the petty jealousies and uncharity of the sect come to the surface, with the revelation of conflicting interests and dogmas. Meanwhile the pastor is at his devotions in the church, and a great crowd is waiting, in a frenzy of religious excitement, to see him pass and heal the sick.

The presbyters in conference have been warned that they must speak in low tones, for there is an invalid asleep in the next room—the pastor's wife. While their debate is at its height the daughter breaks in upon them. Her mother has risen; but "she is no longer alone." The phrase is repeated. "She is no longer alone."

Then comes the crowning miracle. The pastor enters, and the crowd presses into the room after him in awe. In the light of the evening sun his outstretched arms throw the shadow of a cross above the further door. It opens, and his wife appears, dressed in white. She moves towards him, while he stares bewildered. Reaching him, she stumbles and falls. He looks about him for an instant with the words, "But—but it was not meant so . . . ," then falls dead by her side.

The secret of his strength is gone. He dies in the first overwhelming moment of enlightenment, in the first defeat of faith. He has attempted what is "beyond human power."

This is not only the greatest of Björnson's dramas; it is the one most of all his own.

In the second part the pastor's children have grown up, and are engaged in schemes of social regeneration for Norway; in founding societies and clubs, developing ideas of popular education and so on. Here Björnson the agitator is uppermost. The first part of "Beyond

Human Power" has the elements of eternal drama; the second belongs essentially to a nineteenth century period of "movements" in social thought. The one remains undimmed by lapse of time; the other fades.

Strindberg

It is impossible to conceive a more strikingly contrasted group of personalities than the three Scandinavians Ibsen, Björnson, and August Strindberg. They must be considered contemporaries, for although Strindberg was born in 1849, twenty years later than the other two dramatists, his most important work dates from the same period as theirs—between 1875 and 1890. We have seen that Björnson owed much of his recognition to Ibsen. But Strindberg is an entirely independent influence. So far from being an imitator of Ibsen, in many respects he anticipated him. In the Théâtre Libre and the other pioneer ventures of Paris he was the first Scandinavian dramatist in the field. Some scenes in his "Happy Peter," a satire on the

pomposity of the authorities in a little provincial town, are very like Ibsen's later "Enemy of the People." Ibsen treated his theme with greater earnestness, but with far less humour. The parallel between the two plays bears some resemblance to that between Villiers de l'Isle Adam's "La Révolte" and "A Doll's House."

Strindberg not only avoided the influence of Ibsen : he was his only considerable opponent. When "A Doll's House" appeared in 1879 he attacked the play violently, not from the standpoint of the prejudiced Philistine critic who regarded it as an onslaught upon marriage, but from that of the philosopher who saw in it the first signs of the rise of feminism and the degradation of man. He claimed that Ibsen demanded altogether too much of Helmer and too little of Nora ; that she (Nora) was at heart no more than a doll, a puppet for the author's sentimental propaganda. He would have none of Ibsen's women. Hedda Gabler was for him simply a public nuisance, a candidate for the whipping-post ; Hilda Wangel, an

upstart minx, born to drive men mad; Rebecca West, a petticoated prig. In short, he rejected the whole theory of "emancipation" for women, and ordered them back to the kitchen. This leaning toward the side of the man is shown in all his writings.

It is seen most clearly in such plays as "Creditors," "The Father," "Comrades," and "The Dance of Death," where the man (in Strindberg's view the creative force and the only force of real value in statesmanship, science, or art) is in each case hampered by marriage or association with a woman of intellect. If the man's will is weaker than the woman's, she robs him day by day of power, as a weasel sucks the blood of a rabbit, until he is ruined. If his will is the stronger, there comes a moment of conflict in which he forces her to her knees in subjection, and henceforth (since the Strindberg women love power above all else in the world) she is his loyal slave. The former case is the motive of most of Strindberg's tragic dramas, the second of his comedies.

I cannot illustrate this better than by

one or two passages from "Comrades," a four-act comedy written in Paris for the Théâtre Libre. Its principal characters, Axel Alberg and his wife Berta, are Swedish painters living in Paris, and each has submitted a picture to the Salon. In the first act they are discussing their respective prospects.

> BERTA: You are jealous of me. I know you would hate my picture to be accepted.
>
> AXEL: Believe me, Berta, nothing would delight me more.
>
> BERTA: Would it delight you if I were accepted and you were not?
>
> AXEL (*laying his hand upon his heart*): I must feel and see. No. It would annoy me. I grant you that. If only because I paint better than you, and because——
>
> BERTA: You may as well say it at once. Because I am a woman.
>
> AXEL: Yes. I can't deny it. I have a strange feeling at times as if you women were intruders, forcing your way in and demanding the plunder of the battles we fought while you were sitting still by the fireside.

The news comes that Berta's picture has been accepted by the jury, while her

husband's has been refused. She at once begins to patronise him, and arranges as a crowning humiliation that his rejected picture shall be returned from the Salon during an evening party they are giving the next day. Meanwhile the following scene passes, towards the close of the third act :—

BERTA : And so you want to be revenged because you have been placed below me ?

AXEL : Nothing could place me below you. I stood high above you even when I painted your picture.

BERTA : When *you* painted my picture ! Say that again, and I will strike you !

AXEL : You, who despise brute force ? Well, strike me if you will.

BERTA (*aiming a blow at him*) : Do you think I cannot ?

AXEL (*seizing both her wrists and holding them fast*) : No, not that. (*A pause.*) Are you convinced now that I am physically the stronger, too ? Bow down, or I will break you !

BERTA : Do you dare to strike a woman ?

AXEL : Why not ? I only know one reason why I should forbear.

BERTA : And that is ——?

AXEL: That you are not responsible for your actions.

BERTA: Ah, let me go!

AXEL: When you beg my forgiveness! Down upon your knees! (*He forces her down with one hand.*) Now look up to me from below! That is your place, the place you yourself have chosen.

BERTA: Axel! I don't know you any longer! Are you the man who swore to love me, to help me!

AXEL: Yes. I was strong then, but you clipped the hair of my strength away while my tired head lay in your lap. You stole away my power as I slept, and yet enough remains to crush you. Stand up! Enough of this squabble!

(BERTA *falls upon the sofa and weeps.*)

AXEL: Why are you crying?

BERTA: I don't know. Perhaps because I am weak.

AXEL: You see! *I* was your strength. When I took back what was my own, there was nothing left for you. You were like a rubber ball that I blew out: when I threw you aside, you collapsed.

In the last act, while the evening party is in full swing, the rejected picture arrives. It is not Axel's picture, however, but

Berta's with his number upon it. Axel, as "a good comrade," has changed the numbers in order to give her a better chance. Now Berta is willing to end the quarrel, but he has had enough of "comradeship." They separate, and he pensions her off with a month's allowance in advance. Henceforth, as he remarks, he will have "comrades at the *café*, but only a wife at home."

Plays like this have gained Strindberg the reputation of being a "brutalist." But if they are more carefully considered, it will be seen that there is in them none of the heartlessness of the *comique cruel*. Strindberg never creates horrors for the sake of horrors. He either loves or hates his characters; he is incapable of standing aloof from them or of dangling them pitilessly over the depths to no purpose. He is too great a dramatist for that. There is indeed a strange impression of a sympathetic personality even in his most outwardly repulsive scenes. He is logically uncompromising, yet full of pity. I have quoted Strindberg's note upon Björnson. Björnson himself writes: "The Swedes

are usually marked by their curious double nature. They are at once youthful and old, liberally minded and full of prejudice. But Strindberg remains young always and everywhere." Schickele speaks of "that cosmos named Strindberg, breaking out in its course with the eruption of volcanoes, and swung upon its orbit in ever-widening circles."

The characters of his plays are first of all distinguished. They are not the determinist puppets of the modern realist drama, but virile creatures, gods and fighting men, with wills of their own. It is possible to live with them, feel with them, suffer and triumph with them. Their victory is an inspiration, their defeat a tragedy. They are not content merely to live, but must criticise life. Instinct alone will not satisfy them; they must have a philosophy. And in the clash of emotion and intellect, the subjective and the objective, personality and purpose, their dramatic force lies. More than the characters of any other modern dramatist, they are "transition men," groping their way out of old forms and prejudices into a newer age.

These characters have often been called unnatural and extreme, and so indeed they are, if we accept the commonplace as natural and find truth in moderation. Strindberg possesses none of Ibsen's capacity for dramatising, and at the same time humanising, the *bourgeoisie*. He is the most intolerant of artist philosophers, and his method of dealing with stupidity is cavalier enough. He ignores it. A historian of two thousand years hence, finding no record of this age but Strindberg's plays, might be pardoned for assuming that it was peopled exclusively by painters, poets, sculptors, doctors, journalists, and authors of both sexes, all of them persons with very bad manners and very sharp wits. For that is the impression which his plays make. Strindberg refuses to dramatise the mere conflict of social intelligence with social stupidity. He makes no direct attack upon conventionality or shams, such as Ibsen, for example, made in "The Pillars of Society." He exposes no social diseases, as Ibsen did in "Ghosts" and Shaw in "Mrs. Warren's Profession." He offers no plea for justice as against

injustice, as Hauptmann and Gorky have done. He stands altogether apart from politics and the immediate questions of the day. To judge from his plays, he might never have read a newspaper. The problems of the dramatist—sex, love and hate, freedom and slavery, truth and falsehood —exist for him solely as eternal issues, worthy only of discussion by the highest intelligences he can create. For him an onslaught upon the existing order of society is flogging a dead horse. He writes of his peers, and for them. He attacks modern civilisation only by creating exceptional types. And so his characters pass out of present conditions into a world where reason strives to rule life, and feeling to depose reason. They are conscious of their age only in so far as it trammels their individuality.

So far Strindberg ranks with the author of "Hamlet." Of all living dramatists he aims highest, and his failings are the failings of the craftsman unable to set so prodigious a scheme convincingly upon the stage. Moreover, Strindberg's characters have not only their own battles to

fight, but their author's. He shifts his ground constantly, developing from play to play, from the early "Meister Olof" and verse drama to modern naturalism, through a period of Swedenborgian mysticism back to historical drama, and again through dream plays and legends to modern chamber plays and lyrical phantasies. All that he writes of his characters in his polemical prefaces and essays applies equally to his own temperament. "I find the joy of life," he says, "in life's great, fierce battles; my delight is to live and to learn." And again,

> The word "character" has acquired a complex meaning. It meant originally the dominating trait or temperament. Then it became the popular term to describe the mere mechanism, the machine that drives the man—so much so, indeed, that the person who remains the same all his life, and holds on a fixed course, is said to have character, while the man who develops, the expert voyager on the stream of life, who does not sail with all sheets furled, but spreads them to catch the breeze, is named characterless. This *bourgeois* conception of the fixity of temperament was

> transferred to the stage, where all that is *bourgeois* has ever reigned supreme. A "character" upon the stage became a creature ready made—unchangeably drunk, or comical, or irate, or sad. I do not believe in these theatrical "characters." No author can pass summary judgment upon the types that he creates. He cannot classify them as stupid, amiable, brutal, jealous, ambitious, and so on. All such verdicts must be challenged by the naturalists, who know how rich and wonderful the soul of man can be, and who realise that "vice" has an obverse not altogether unlike virtue.

As with the characters, so with the man. In Strindberg we are dealing not with one person, but with many: poet and logician, realist and idealist, atheist and mystic. From the standpoint of the Theatre his modern "naturalistic plays" are the most important. These were written during the period 1880—1895, and Strindberg describes them as attempts to mould the form of drama in accordance with modern conditions. In the four longer plays, "The Father," "Comrades," "The People of Hemso," and "The Keys of Heaven"

there is no especial originality of form. Written in the first instance for the Théâtre Libre, they demand only the simplest of scenery, but a high level of acting. Their "naturalism," in fact, has a twofold significance. Strindberg's aim was not only a natural study of life, but its most natural reproduction upon the stage; and this could only be achieved by a theatre bent upon essentials, and intolerant of elaborate decoration, dresses, and scenic effects. "Theatre reform" was in the air at this time, and Strindberg was a theatre reformer as well as a dramatist. Among other changes, he urged side lighting instead of footlights, a smaller, properly darkened auditorium, less paint and "make-up" for the actors, a return to natural gestures and tones of voice upon the stage, and the shortening, if not the complete abolition, of the intervals between the acts. In "Miss Julia" and "Creditors," which followed "The Father," he attempted an altogether new form in order to meet all these demands. Both are very long one-act plays. "Miss Julia" requires nearly two hours for performance, and

the action is represented as passing throughout a midsummer night. The dialogue is interrupted twice: once by a song and again by a dance; and these represent the intervals of what is in reality a three-act play. The same division into three parts is seen in "Creditors." In Strindberg's view this device maintained the stage illusion undisturbed without straining the attention of the audience too far. Another new development was the lessening of the number of characters. In "Miss Julia," as in "Creditors," there are only three speaking parts, and two persons carry on a scene sometimes uninterruptedly for forty minutes.

The theatrical audience is the most impatient and sensitive of all crowds, and it is clear that experiments such as this could only succeed in the hands of a master dramatist. There is nothing more difficult to handle than a long duologue where the "action" consists solely in the interplay of ideas. Yet "Miss Julia," a "naturalistic tragedy," is the most successful of all Strindberg's plays. It was prohibited by the censor in Sweden, but

has been played frequently in Germany and Austria.

"Miss Julia" and "Creditors" belong to a group of eleven one-act plays, all more or less following the lines I have described above. Among the others are "The Stronger Woman," "Simoon," "Playing with Fire," "Before Death," and "The First Warning." "The Stronger Woman" is something of a dramatic curiosity, for it has only two characters, one of whom is silent throughout. It was played in London in the autumn of 1909 by Madame Lydia Yavorskaia (Princess Bariatinsky) and Lady Tree. An English version of "Simoon" has also been played by Lady Tree in the provinces, and a translation of "The Father" has been published. The whole of Strindberg's work for the stage appears in the German collected edition of his writings. There are some forty-six plays in all, together with many novels, critical and historical studies, and several volumes of verse.

Strindberg is the least popular of the moderns, and he is likely to remain so.

The reason for this unpopularity will already have been gathered from the outline of his dramatic method that I have given. His plays are not for the many, but neither are they for what are often termed "the cultured few." Strindberg loathes "the cultured" with an unutterable loathing, as long as their culture means no more than good manners, good taste, academic familiarity with literature, university education, and a respect for the prevailing standards of religion and morality. They are Apollans; he is a Dionysian. He estranges the revolutionists by his contempt for politics, the feminists by his attitude towards women, the romanticists by his naturalism, and the realists by his mysticism. Only the philosophers remain, and he does not speak their language. Moreover, he is bold enough to change his mind. In this age he is an outcast.

I need only add one fact which sums up the man and his work: Nietzsche admired him greatly.

V

GERMANY

SUDERMANN, HAUPTMANN AND WEDEKIND

THE Ibsenite controversy in Germany, as we have seen, was fierce but short-lived. One of the chief advantages of the German repertory theatre system is its catholicity. There is room in it for new and old, classical verse-drama and modern realism. If the provincial Schauspielhaus or Stadttheater devotes three evenings a week to the popular comedy or farce of the day, the moderns have no cause to grumble, for the remaining evenings may be given to Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Hauptmann, Strindberg, or Shaw. During the last twenty years the German Theatre has become the most cosmopolitan in the world. This is partly due to its strategic position. North Germany has much in common, both in language and in spirit, with Scandinavia; and Ibsen, Björnson

and Strindberg are not only well translated, but can be played with as much sympathy and understanding in Berlin as in Christiania or Stockholm. Tolstoy, Gorky and Tchekhov come from Russia through the eastern provinces, and many of their plays have been first produced in Berlin, instead of in St. Petersburg. Austria and South Germany have nothing but a nominal frontier to divide them, and the Viennese dramatists Schnitzler, Felix Salten, Hermann Bahr and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, find an audience without need of translation. D'Annunzio comes from Italy, Maeterlinck from France and Belgium, Heijermanns from Holland and Bernard Shaw from England. All their plays are published in book form, and many of them in cheap popular editions. But the Theatre, rather than the library or the bookseller's shop, is the centre of intellectual life. Playgoing is a real habit, and the Theatre is respected accordingly. Many decades of State-endowed verse-drama and opera have formed the habit, and now the moderns are able to profit by it.

The German mind, too, is extraordinarily sensitive to "advanced" movements in art or in thought, and especially to "advanced" reputations. The German playgoer accepted Ibsen largely because he was a much-discussed dramatist, and not by any means altogether on his merits. Feminism, for example, is not really popular in Germany; but the German Helmer will often applaud "A Doll's House" at the Theatre. He will even take his wife to see the play, and discuss it with her afterwards. This susceptibility to European influences and reputations, and the general familiarity with ideas which accompanies it, must be taken into account in any consideration of the German Theatre. There is always a welcome for the problem play, whatever the problem may be. Bernard Shaw has already become almost a popular author. Wedekind's "Frühlings Erwachen," which in England would probably never have found a publisher, to say nothing of a manager willing to produce it, has made a sensational success. Björnson's "Beyond Human Power" is consistently

played by the smaller repertory theatres. The same is true of Tolstoy's "Powers of Darkness" and Maeterlinck's "Monna Vanna," two plays which have never been publicly performed in England. Wilde's "Salome" and Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Elektra" have not only been successfully played in the ordinary theatre, but have reached the summit of contemporary fame by serving as librettos for the operas of Richard Strauss.

Sudermann

Our concern, however, is first of all with German dramatists rather than with the conditions of the German Theatre. The position at the time of the foundation of the Freie Bühne in 1889 has already been described. The "modern" German stage was then held by Gustav Freytag, Paul Heyse, Paul Lindau, and adaptations from the French of Dumas and Sardou. Sudermann, hitherto known only as a novelist, had just produced his first play, "Die Ehre" (Honour). Sudermann came, therefore, before Hauptmann, and he had nothing to do directly with the Freie

Bühne group of dramatists. "Die Ehre" was first performed in one of the leading theatres of Berlin, and it was received with an enthusiasm altogether beyond its merits. The early catchwords of Ibsenism and advanced drama had just reached the ears of the general public, and the audience, steeped in the demi-monde sentimentality of Dumas and the theatricality of Sardou, welcomed Sudermann as the prophet of a new era. He tempered the Scandinavian winds to these shorn lambs of the Theatre. He nursed them tenderly, adding a cautious teaspoonful of modernity to their mother's milk in order to flatter their vanity and assist digestion. "Honour" was his subject—the honour of an officer and a gentleman. He attacked the conception with *bourgeois* bravado. He ridiculed the duel as a vehicle of personal "satisfaction." But in the place of honour he had nothing to offer but vague and pretentious sentiment, theatricality and falsehood. There is not one glimmer of reality in the whole play, and his hero, a young merchant, is a man of straw upon whose making no artist

could conceivably have wasted an hour. All this may have appeared highly revolutionary to a Prussian Junker or an officer in a cavalry regiment, but after Ibsen it contributed less than nothing to drama. The production of "Die Ehre," in short, was a landmark in theatrical history, but not in the history of the Theatre.

Sudermann, however, had displeased the military caste, and his next play, "Sodoms Ende," was condemned as immoral, and suspended for a time by order of the Court. This was unfortunate, for there is nothing which stamps an author as "advanced" so distinctively as a conflict with the censorship, and nothing (in Germany) so likely to gain him popular respect as an artist. Sudermann was instantly classed with his betters, Ibsen, Hauptmann and Strindberg; although in reality "Sodoms Ende" was as trivial a piece of work as "Die Ehre." It was followed by "Heimat" (Magda), and this, the third play of an already successful author, marked him finally as a pedlar of stale wares.

Sudermann's instinct for the theatre and nothing but the theatre led him here to the apotheosis of the commercial playwright—the creation of a great emotional part for a great actress. "Magda" is a dramatisation of half-truths and commonplace. It is sultry, stagey, sentimental to the point of nausea. It has all the surface characteristics of a great play, but the compelling force is lacking. Your true dramatist is driven to write because he has something definite to say. Sudermann is never so driven. With a cold-blooded refinement of theatricality he devises scene after scene, arranges situation after situation, purely for the effect of the moment. His "curtains" are mechanically perfect. He has wit, geniality, real gifts of dialogue, sense of the theatre—everything but the mind that can choose a worthy subject and handle it finely. That word "subject" is all-embracing. It means more than a single dramatic idea. It includes a whole group of personalities with an infinite interplay of thought and feeling. From this vast material the dramatist must choose, and it depends upon the quality of

his choice—that is to say, upon his own temperament—whether his play shall be distinguished or commonplace. Sudermann has always made his choice in the spirit of the theatrical purveyor. Dumas and Sardou did the same, and if Sudermann were content to rank with them there would be no necessity to deal with him among the modern dramatists. But his plays are pretentious. He claims to solve the problems of the age. In "Die Ehre," as we have seen, he deals with the conception of honour; in "Magda" with the problem of the artist-woman and her family; in "Das Glück im Winkel" and "Das Blumenboot" with the woman and marriage; in "Es Lebe das Leben" with Socialism and again with marriage; in "Morituri" with "the eternal masculine"; and in "Johannisfeuer" with the instincts of "heathendom" breaking out in the lives of modern men and women. In every case the atmosphere is created with extraordinary skill, and in every case the characters, the presentment of the problem and its solution are false through and through

Take the instance of the protaganists in "Magda." On the one hand is the old officer, the iron head of the patriarchal family, a man devoid of any power save obstinacy. On the other, the actress-daughter, lineal descendant as a stage type of the Lady of the Camelias. The catchwords of feminism are upon her lips, but coming from her they have no meaning. She is a garrulous sentimentalist, and the only convincing conflict in the play is not the alleged clash of interests between the artist-woman and her surroundings, but the old struggle between parent and child over filial piety and obedience. The modernity of all the other plays I have mentioned is just as superficial. In "Das Blumenboot" the "strong, silent man" (a stupid but honest merchant, that familiar Sudermann type!) dominates the play. His wife, bored to death by him and egged on by her flighty sister, begins an intrigue with a big game hunter home from Africa, and not averse to stalking small deer. The "strong, silent man" shoots the hunter, and enters triumphant at the end of the fourth act.

All the sinners of the play cower before him. Wives return to their husbands with prayers for forgiveness, and amid universal repentance the curtain falls.

The same type may be seen in Vogelreuter of "Johannisfeuer," an honest farmer with a violent temper and a confirmed habit of getting his own way. Vogelreuter's daughter Trude is to be married to a young architect, Georg von Hartwig. But Trude has a foster-sister Marikke, a gipsy child found long ago upon the high-road in a year of famine. As the play develops, Georg finds himself drawn more and more to Marikke and away from Trude, who is at best a doll. The third act passes upon Midsummer Eve (the Johannis night), and opens with a banquet in Vogelreuter's house. Through the open windows there is seen the glow of bonfires, as the peasants keep their yearly festival. The pastor rises to make a speech—a heathen speech to fit the occasion, as Vogelreuter suggests. But he has only one speech, a sermon; and only one text to offer: "God is Love." He has barely done when Georg springs

to his feet. The spirit of Johannis night is upon him. He will preach another gospel:—

> GEORG: . . . Look you, Herr Pastor, a spark of heathendom smoulders in us all. It has lingered through the centuries. Once in every year it bursts into flame, and then it is called Johannis Fire. Once in every year comes a night of freedom. Yes, a night of freedom. Then the witches ride upon the wind with scornful laughter, up to the Brocken in the height; then the wild army stalks across the forest; then there awaken in our hearts the wild desires that have never been fulfilled by life, and, indeed, should never be fulfilled. No matter what the laws may be that rule the world of every day; for one desire that is gratified, for one fulfilled ambition that comes mercifully to make glad our hearts, a thousand others must perish miserably—some perhaps because they were eternally beyond our reach, but others—yes, others because we let them slip from our grasp like wild birds upon which our hands closed all too carelessly. . . . However that may be, once in all the year comes our night of freedom. Do you know

what those flames are that are shooting up out there? They are the ghosts of our dead longings, the red plumage of the birds of Paradise that we could perhaps have sheltered for a lifetime, had they not flown away. They are the old chaos—the heathendom in us. And though law and comfort rule our lives at other times, this is Midsummer Eve. To those old pagan fires I raise my glass. May they flame high for ever as they flame to-night! Hoch! Hoch! and once more, Hoch! . . . Will no one drink with me?

(*A pause.*)

MARIKKE (*trembling*): I will.

(*They touch their glasses, looking one another in the face.*)

The passage is characteristic of Sudermann's method. Slowly, sentence by sentence, through two long acts, the play has climbed to reach this scene. The thrill was predestined. It is the motive of the drama, not the inevitable result. Midsummer Eve—the Johannis Feast—young hearts on fire—wild longings—painted rhetoric—"heathendom" and the Church. Here is matter enough and to

spare. A flare of red light in the background; the family party about the table, ruled by the inexorable Vogelreuter; Georg and Marikke upon their feet touching glasses; "ghosts of dead desires," "red plumage of the birds of Paradise." This is the triumph of the playmaker—the pinnacled third act. Later on comes a touch of anti-climax and pathos. The Johannis fires are out. Georg and Marikke are left alone. The house is still. And the ashes are kindled once again. Marikke, daughter of the gipsy-woman, comes to Georg and kisses him. "My mother steals. I will steal too!" The curtain falls.

In that word "steal" lies Sudermann's confession of impotence. The love of Georg and Marikke is stolen love. Why? Because they dare not face Vogelreuter and tell him what has happened. He "would strike them both dead." Vogelreuter is an honest Protestant, with no sympathy for heathendom, and Vogelreuter wins. In the end Georg marries Trude, and Marikke is left watching them set out for the church.

Once again it must be said that Sudermann solves no problems. He is incapable even of presenting them fairly. His only real and living characters are figures like Vogelreuter, who destroy drama by the blind force of unintelligent will. Such a person cannot be moved either by emotion or logic. Both break about him harmlessly in sentimental spray. To make him the arbiter of life is to appeal to a stone wall. Sudermann, like so many dramatists before and after him, has attempted the impossible. He has tried to get great drama from second-rate people, second-rate life, second-rate thought. From all his work two facts emerge. The first, that he is technically the most accomplished of living playwrights. The second, that he has never drawn a memorable personality nor said a memorable thing.

Gerhart Hauptmann

After Sudermann, Hauptmann. We pass from the pedlar to the poet. For Gerhart Hauptmann is a poet and an

artist; so much is certain. His claim to be considered a great dramatist is more doubtful. In Sudermann we see the barrenness of the author who is a playwright-craftsman and nothing more; in Hauptmann the extreme of untheatricality, the erratic method of a sensitive genius who is not consciously striving after a new vehicle of expression, but who hurls refinement of observation, minute impressions of detail, poetry and beauty of tone, piecemeal upon the stage.

It has often been said that Hauptmann has created new forms, and that he is the only living dramatist who has passed beyond Ibsen. There is some truth in this. His plays are written in new forms. "The Weavers," with its extraordinary number of characters, its loosely-grouped five acts and its subordination of everything — personality, construction, often drama—to the central idea of a workmen's strike, is certainly a play that Ibsen would not have written. "Rose Bernd," a later play in which all the events of the drama occur between the acts, and the acts themselves are no more than discus-

sions of what has happened, is another innovation. But a new dramatic form can only have lasting value when it is created by a great craftsman. It must be devised deliberately by an author who believes that through it, and through it alone, he can express himself fully in the theatre. Ibsen devised such a form. Anton Tchekhov attempted to devise another. The effort requires concentration upon the theatre, endless thought and careful planning. The dramatist who attempts a revolution must first count the cost, and endeavour to make his new form effectual. Hauptmann's dramatic method shows no such consideration. It is altogether tentative and incoherent. To say that many of his plays stamp him as a novelist who has wandered into the theatre by mistake is not to belittle his power as an imaginative writer. That would be impossible. The only question is one of judgment; and a real combination of genius and judgment is rare enough. When literary judgment is required to include a sense of the Theatre, it is rarest of all—and there lies the secret

of the rarity of the great dramatist. "*Le style c'est l'homme.*" It is impossible to discuss the plays of any author without taking into account his bent as an artist. Hauptmann is one of the most gifted of living writers, but the style in his case is not adapted first and foremost to the service of drama. No one can witness the performance of a series of his plays without feeling that many of their subtleties are being strangled at birth; and a reading of them confirms the impression. Hauptmann's men and women are real. His method is sincere, but it often fails of its effect. There are dramatic shades of colour which are "fast" in the test of the footlights. There are other shades which are always heightened in effect—and these are found only in the paint-box of the master. Hauptmann's colours are delicately chosen, but they are prone to fade. So it is that even "The Weavers" and "The Sunken Bell," although they pass into edition after edition in book form, have almost ceased to hold the German stage. Fifteen years ago they were welcomed as the masterpieces of a new

renaissance. Paul Schlenther, Hauptmann's biographer, wrote: "At thirty-five years of age he is a famous man. He stands at life's zenith. . . . We wait for what is yet to come." This was in 1897. In 1898 Hauptmann wrote "Fuhrmann Henschel," a return to modern tragedy. "Michael Kramer," "Der Rote Hahn," and "Rose Bernd" followed. "Schluck und Jau" and "Elga" were unfortunate interludes for which even his supporters were compelled to make excuses, but there can be no doubt that all the later plays represent a steady decline, and that they would have been far completer works of art in the form of novels.

In these critical studies of the modern dramatists textual criticism alone is of no value, and I have endeavoured in each case to give some impression of the author's individuality, the elusive quality and essence of the man as shown in his work. The dramatist, as dramatist, lives in a world of his own creation, peopled by his own characters; and the critic lives in just such a world of dramatists,

each with his own especial characteristic or motive force. In Björnson the motive is the spirit of the pastor-agitator; in Strindberg, a strange compound of intellect and prejudice; in Sudermann, empty sense of the theatre. Hauptmann is distinguished most clearly by his sensitiveness. Every great imaginative writer is sensitive to impression. The quality is not only twin-born with intelligence; it is a part of the author's stock-in-trade. But Hauptmann is almost hyper-sensitive. His creative work is a history of "influences," good and bad. Only in the rarest flashes does he escape from them.

First come the imaginative influences that have moulded his plays. "Vor Sonnenaufgang" was the first naturalistic drama in Germany. With "Das Friedensfest" (The Coming of Peace) it sprang from Tolstoy and Zola. "Einsame Menschen" (Lonely Lives) is full of Ibsenite figures, but without Ibsen's power. "Die Weber" (The Weavers) is Hauptmann's first strongly individual work, and here the influence comes, not from imaginative literature, but from the

revolutionary thought of the time. The play was prohibited at the Deutsches Theater, and the revolutionists were up in arms. They proclaimed Hauptmann as a proletarian leader, and their disappointment was the greater when "Die Weber" was followed by the two comedies "Kollege Crampton" and "Der Biberpelz" (The Thieves' Comedy). In reality Hauptmann was incapable of being a "leader." In "Die Weber" he had not led, but followed. The influence which made him side with the strikers was as clear as the previous influence of Zola, Tolstoi, and Ibsen. The wrongs of the proletariat were "in the air." Hauptmann gave them imaginative expression; as an artist he could do no more. There are scenes in "The Weavers" that can never be forgotten. The hopeless poverty, the hunger, the half-animal, half-childlike docility of the workpeople, and then their blind upheaval of collective revenge—these are faithfully studied. One sees the first rush of the strikers as they break into Dreissiger's drawing-room; they are like moles in daylight. Then the fury of

destruction catches them, and as they smash at everything within their reach they seem to illustrate the saying of the old weaver at the close of the third act: "A jeder Mensch hat halt 'ne Sehnsucht" —"every man has his longing." In "The Weavers" Hauptmann expressed this "Sehnsucht"—the reaching, striving impulse in men; the common desire. There is imaginative power in the play. Dramatic power—at moments. But great drama as a whole? Of Hauptmann, as of the weavers, it can only be said: "A jeder Mensch hat halt 'ne Sehnsucht." The longing is not always fulfilled.

Turning to the dream-poem "Hannele" we find an altogether new development. Nothing illustrates Hauptmann's insecure hold upon the Theatre more clearly than his incessant wavering between one dramatic method and another. The course he follows is: Naturalism ("Vor Sonnenaufgang")—social drama ("Einsame Menschen" and "Die Weber")—a touch of the *comique cruel* ("Kollege Crampton" and "Der Biberpelz")—mysticism and romance ("Hannele" to "Die versunkene

Glocke")—back to modern realism ("Fuhrmann Henschel")—Shakespearean farce ("Schluck und Jau")—tragi-comedy ("Der rote Hahn")—saga-drama ("Der arme Heinrich")—fairy-drama ("Und Pippa tanzt!")—comedy ("Die Jungfern von Bischofsberg")—"modernisation" of classical legend ("Griselda"). This may be called versatility, but it has more than a suspicion of the versatility of the weathercock. Hauptmann is always groping, always uncertain in his method. After the first performances of his "Florian Geyer" and "Schluck und Jau" in Berlin whole acts were cut out, and a stage version continued to be played without them. "Elga" is an unfinished trifle written in three days, and should never have been given in the theatre. The expert craftsman takes care never to drop such shavings.

To return to "Hannele." The new element in Hauptmann's work was the dream of heaven. The scene of poverty is still there, with the child upon her deathbed in the workhouse. So far the play is linked with "The Weavers." The

exquisite verse of the dream-fantasy foreshadows "The Sunken Bell." It is chiefly the plays of this period that have made Hauptmann famous, and indeed "Hannele," "Florian Geyer" and "The Sunken Bell" are all works of poetic, if not of dramatic genius. "The Sunken Bell," "ein deutsches Märchendrama," can never be to any other nation what it is to Germany. Its subject is taken direct from Grimm's mythology, and the spirit of its verse is untranslateable. Into the German forest, peopled with gnomes and elves and creatures of the woods, comes the artist Heinrich. His great work, which ended in disappointment, reflects Hauptmann's failure with "Florian Geyer." The leaving of his wife and children in order to climb the mountain with Rautendelein is an echo of "Einsame Menschen." Heinrich, like Johannes Vockerat, strives after the unattainable. Once more the refrain which runs through all of Hauptmann's plays: "A jeder Mensch hat halt 'ne Sehnsucht." Once more the extraordinary sway of books, legends and personalities.

With the series of plays from "Fuhrmann Henschel" to "Griselda," we come to the decline and fall of Hauptmann as a dramatist. When he returned from the dream-world of "The Sunken Bell" to his original modern form in "Fuhrmann Henschel," the change was a reaction and not an advance. It was not entirely by chance that this reaction came at the same time as the publication of his biography by Paul Schlenther, with the words I have already quoted: "He stands at life's zenith. . . . We wait for what is yet to come." A biographer at thirty-five may easily prove a false friend. "Fuhrmann Henschel" was said by Hauptmann's admirers to represent a "recuperation" after the colossal effort of "The Sunken Bell." But why should such a "recuperation" have appeared upon the stage? The answer is simple enough. Hauptmann was, and is, as susceptible to the influence of friends and conditions as to the imaginative work of other writers. The theatres of Berlin pressed him for further work. Any play that bore his name was good enough for them to

produce. He was the prodigy of the hour, and he suffered from the grossest over-estimation. Pan-Germanic critics, determined at any cost to prove the superiority of the native German drama to all others, praised him extravagantly, and endeavoured to thrust him into a position among the classics. University professors turned from the interminable study of the second part of "Faust" to lecture upon Hauptmann's message to the world, and to interpret the inner meaning of "Hannele" and "The Sunken Bell." Appreciations, critical studies and monographs appeared by the score, and a swarm of literary parasites contrived to share in the spoils by (to use Swinburne's description of the writer of Shakespearean introductions) "shooting their rubbish-heap" at the door of the dramatist of the day.

Hauptmann's reputation, however, was always artificially maintained. His first striking success had been in the theatre, with "Vor Sonnenaufgang." He passed from the pioneer stage of the Freie Bühne to the Deutsches Theater. "The Sunken Bell" brought him fame. But with

the plays from "Fuhrmann Henschel" onwards he drifted steadily out of touch with the real theatre-going public, and became the apostle of a literary cult. His followers applauded the growing obscurity of his work. They succeeded in making apparent successes out of actual failures such as "Rose Bernd." And the final result of this continual harrying into the theatre of an undramatic artist is seen in "Griselda" (1909). This play hardly rises to the commonplace. As a "modern" treatment of Boccaccio's Griselda legend it is flat and uninspired; as the work of a poet of Hauptmann's standing, not yet past middle life, it is a tragic disappointment. There is clearly something fatally wrong with a playwright who, at forty-seven years of age, can produce a drama bearing all the signs of senile decay.

But "Griselda" does not represent the real Hauptmann, any more than "Misalliance" represents the real Bernard Shaw. It is well to turn to the Silesian peasant dramas, for in them lies the Hauptmann atmosphere which is his most real service to the theatre. All the Silesian plays are

written in dialect, and two of them, the original editions of "The Weavers" (De Waber) and "Fuhrmann Henschel," in a dialect so obscure that Hauptmann was compelled to make a translation into more intelligible German for performance. Others, such as "Vor Sonnenaufgang," remain very difficult to follow throughout. One passage may be quoted:

LIESE: Du, Guste! de Marie iis furt.

AUGUSTE: Joa wull doch?

LIESE: Gih nei! freu' die Kutscha-Franzen, se milkt er an Truppen Milch ei.

BEIBST: Na! doa lusst ok de Spillern nee ernt derzune kumma.

AUGUSTE: Oh jechtlich! nee ok nee! bei Leibe nich!

LIESE: A su a oarm Weib miit achta.

AUGUSTE: Acht kleene Bälge!—die wull'n laba.

LIESE: Ne amool an Truppen Milch thuns' er ginn'n . . . meschant is doas.

Like most popular German dialects, this bears as much resemblance to English (especially in the spoken form) as to pure German. Whatever may be said of them

as drama, the Hauptmann dialect plays have contributed much to the literature of Germany. They are individual and national, and in the theatre their great service has been to show the way back from the mere cosmopolitanism of the "society drama" to the tragic problems near at hand, among the common people.

The weavers groping towards freedom; Fuhrmann Henschel driving his cart upon the roads, and finding at last that every way is barred but the way to death; Rose Bernd defending her unborn child against a sneering world; these are elemental figures gravely set upon the canvas. It is strange to watch them move in the theatre, for Hauptmann's art as dramatist is unsustained, and only in isolated scenes is he able to carry his men and women out of their actual setting into the real world of drama where one can forget the stage, the curtain and the audience. For the most part the figures are convincing enough, but they seem to have wandered in upon the stage from the fields and hostelries of their own province, to be exhibited like living pictures coloured after

nature. A hundred instances of Hauptmann's genius for atmosphere and setting could be given. I will quote only one of the most vivid—the opening of the second act of "Vor Sonnenaufgang":

> Early morning, towards four o'clock. The windows of the farmhouse are lit from within. A pale grey light through the gateway, changing slowly to dark red and afterwards to the brightness of day. Under the gateway, upon the ground, sits Beibst, whetting his scythe. As the curtain rises his silhouetted figure is seen against the sky, and the regular, monotonous beat of his scythe-hammer is heard upon the anvil. For some moments this remains the only sound, but the grave stillness of the morning is presently disturbed by the clamour of the late departures from the inn. The door of the farmhouse is shut with a bang. The lights in the windows are put out. A distant barking of dogs, with loud, confused crowings from the yard. Upon the path leading from the inn a dark figure is dimly seen, moving unsteadily across the courtyard.

Here, "before sunrise," the action passes. The setting is typical. The

fates of the Hauptmann peasantry are bound up with their farms and their cattle, their horses and their crops. The tragedy of Fuhrmann Henschel is the tragedy of a farmer. Little troubles and great troubles together overwhelm him. Three of his horses die first; then his wife and daughter. He drives over his favourite dog. The weather is bad. He has promised his dead wife never to marry again, but he breaks his promise; and every succeeding blow is to him a punishment. So, little by little, he is driven to despair. He cannot explain why. He cannot explain anything. He is only a weak man against the all-powerful gods.

Such a tragedy falls short of greatness, like Mr. Galsworthy's "Justice," because it is concerned only with the "average man." Henschel, like all of Hauptmann's peasant characters, is far removed from the hero pursued by fate. Great tragedy depends upon the creation of exceptional figures; of men and women who will not fail, who, indeed, cannot fail, since even if they are overwhelmed by the forces they defy their very defeat inspires us, and their

power remains unbroken. Hauptmann's plays depend solely upon his power of observation, his sympathy and his understanding. But these are not the whole armour of the dramatist. They are only the breastplate—not the sword.

Wedekind

In his "Playboy of the Western World" Mr. J. M. Synge satirised bitterly the effect of even a self-styled giant upon a race of pigmies. His Christopher comes to a remote village in the West of Ireland with the tale that he has killed his father, and the decadent peasants, drained of their best blood by emigration and reduced to a group of women, old men and weaklings, make a hero of him. The story of his crime fascinates them. He has at least done something notable, something powerful, something that stands for will and firm resolve in this land of dreams and despair. The women worship him and bring him presents; the loafers of the village inn regard him with awe. Christy finds himself famous.

Even so Frank Wedekind came, a few years ago, to the German Theatre, with the reputation of having slain, not his father, but morality. His plays were the last word in unconventionality and daring. Where other dramatists touched delicately, for fear of over-boldness, upon the woman with a past or the life of the *demi-monde*, he dragged pathology, sex perversion and insanity relentlessly upon the stage. He thrived upon prohibitions, prosecutions, newspaper outcry and notoriety in general. He proclaimed openly his contempt for the public, and no critical attacks could penetrate his monstrous egoism. Beside the other playwrights of the period—Sudermann the trimmer and Gerhart Hauptmann the sensitive idealist—he seemed a giant individuality, like a Bismarck or a Nietzsche. A self-styled giant, perhaps; but that only made him the more attractive to the weaklings. He insulted them, and they rushed to see his plays. His vogue increased when he appeared himself as actor, and swaggered like the Playboy in a leading part. This was, indeed, a phenomenon. The German

playgoers gasped. They had heard of dramatists who ventured to despise the public—indeed, the attitude was considered highly creditable, as indicating lofty ideals and intellectual refinement; but of an actor audacious enough to claim the same superiority, never. That Wedekind should dare to defy the critics and exhibit himself night after night in an indifferent display of acting—this was inexplicable. So bold a spirit, they reflected, must at least have the attributes of Superman.

Mr. Synge's Christy, of course, had not really killed his father, and neither had Wedekind really killed morality. Like most alleged immoralists, he had a stern gospel of his own to preach. Behind the brutality of his plays there is the force of conviction that no mere sensationalist or commercial playwright can ever show. Wedekind's contempt for "das Publikum" is real. He despises the theatre-going mob so sincerely that he refuses even to make use of it as a speculative investment. He may be a fanatic, but he is never a charlatan. An ingenious aphorist has named him

" Frau Nietzsche " ; and as far as popularity-hunting is concerned, Nietzsche's wife should be above suspicion.

Wedekind as dramatist is something more than an eccentric, but something less than a creative genius. Flashes of genius he has, emerging fitfully from clouds of eccentricity. He is an author who cannot readily be " placed." To the critic bent upon classification, who would label him as naturalist or symbolist, realist or idealist or mystic, he must remain an enigma. He belongs to no school, and hitherto he has had no followers. His plays are the most aggressively individual of our time. Some of them, like " Oaha " and " Hidalla," are not only frankly autobiographical, but appear to exploit a personal grievance. The individuality behind them is crude and obtrusive. It is almost devoid of taste or sense of form. But it is valuable because of its power. It offers us a rare criticism of modern life by presenting it from a new angle. Wedekind is no hawker of a cheap optimistic philosophy, like Sudermann. He has none of Hauptmann's sympathy with the common

man. For him the common man is merely a member of the public which he despises; an animated doll built of cowardly prejudices; one of the mob that howls the artist down. Wedekind in the theatre is like Zarathustra in the market place.

His practice of the playwright's craft is just as individual. In the construction of his plays he obeys no law but his own convenience. He has revived the monologue, which was said to have been destroyed by Ibsen twenty years ago. He writes speeches as long as those in the hell scene of "Man and Superman." His "curtains" are no more than chance interruptions of an otherwise interminable dialogue. He never leads up to a scene; it simply occurs casually and passes. This scorn of theatrical effect is strange enough in a dramatist who is also an actor; but his other variations of form are stranger still. In "Die Buchse der Pandora" the first act is written in German, the second in French, and the third in English.[1] In the modern tragedy

[1] Wedekind is himself half-Swiss and half-Hanoverian. The English of "Die Buchse

of "Frühlings Erwachen" he introduces a scene in a graveyard at night, where a boy comes from the grave carrying his own head beneath his arm, to talk with his old schoolfellow. In the same scene "der vermummte Herr"—the Man with the Mask—appears in order to drive the dead boy back into the grave, and to carry the living back with him to life. This passage (to which I shall return later) is beyond a doubt the most beautiful in the play, but it was clearly not designed for the stage. The leap from realism to fantasy is too sudden, and it is a leap which Wedekind is constantly taking. Over and over again, in his modern plays, the characters who begin as real persons become the vaguest shadows, and pass into a dream world of their own. They may not visibly carry their heads beneath their arms, but a veil of mist seems to descend between them and the audience, and they grow unreal without growing ethereal. In Anton Tchekhov's play, "The Seagull," the idealist Constantine

der Pandora" is calculated to impress Berlin rather than London.

maintains that it is the function of the artist to represent life neither as it is nor as we think it ought to be, but as we see it in our dreams. Of many of Wedekind's plays it may be said that they represent life neither as it is, nor as it ought to be, but as we see it in our nightmares. They create the same effect of vague oppression, of meaningless effort, of vast heights and depths, of tremblings upon the precipice of insanity.

I turn now to Wedekind's masterpiece, "Frühlings Erwachen" (Spring's Awakening). It is necessary first to understand how such a play came to be written. Wedekind names it "a children's tragedy," and the "Frühlings Erwachen" is the awakening of sex. For some reason (to be found probably in the introspective national temperament) Germany has the unfortunate distinction of being the land of child suicides. Many hundreds of these suicides are recorded yearly, and practically without exception they occur at the age of puberty. The subject of "Frühlings Erwachen" was bound to be touched upon sooner or later in literature, and Wedekind

chose to deal with it in the form of a play. No one can quarrel with this choice, for he has treated it (unlike the themes of his other plays) with rare delicacy and beauty. Wedekind is at his greatest here because he is most in earnest and most courageous. The play is an indictment of the whole present upbringing of children, yet it has the force, not of a pamphlet, but of a work of art. It is in reality what it claims to be—"a children's tragedy."

In it there is no need of argument, or of patient hearing of both sides. Argument belongs to the grown ups; here Wedekind presents simply a group of innocents striving after the unknown.

Moritz and Melchior are two boys at school. Both are at the critical age of puberty. They talk to one another of their first impulses of sex; now haltingly, now with sudden bursts of confidence. All is speculation; they have found a new mystery.

Some girls pass by; among them Wendla, lately promoted to long frocks because short ones at her age are "not

proper." The girls, too, hover about the mysterious subject in their own fashion. "What does it mean to be married?" "Are boy babies nicer than girls?" They pass on.

Melchior and Wendla meet by chance in the woods. Wendla leads him on to romp with her, and then, at first half in play, to strike her. He does so, and then rushes shamefully away.

Wendla's married sister has a new baby. Wendla implores her mother to tell her how it came, but she is put off with empty phrases.

Melchior and Wendla meet again. This time they have taken refuge in a hayloft from a thunderstorm. The great, unknown instinct drives them to one another.

The following day Wendla has no feeling of shame. She is triumphantly happy; she longs to tell someone all about it. Now, at last, she knows.

Moritz, the duller of the two boys, sits alone in the forest, brooding. He cannot take this new mystery of life light-heartedly. It is all so ugly. No one has

made it clear to him ; no one has cared. Ilsa, an artist's model, comes by. She speaks to him ; tells him of her life. She is ready to make love to him. He could have her for the asking. But he flings her aside, sends her away, and shoots himself.

The schoolmasters sit in judgment. Among the dead Moritz's papers his father has found a drawing made by Melchior, representing the physiological facts of sex. This drawing is held to be the cause of suicide. Melchior is silenced in every effort to defend himself. The authorities speak ponderously of "moral insanity." Melchior is sent to a reformatory. There he finds no peace, for the other boys are unashamedly corrupt.

Wendla dies in giving birth to a child. She cries, "Oh, mother, why didn't you tell me everything?" and the reply is the old one: "My mother told me no more."

Last comes the graveyard scene. Melchior, escaping from the reformatory, leaps over the wall and discovers a new mound of earth with a tombstone. "Here

lies Wendla Bergmann. Blessed are the pure in heart." Then it is that Moritz appears, carrying his head beneath his arm. A conversation between the dead and the living. Moritz urges Melchior to kill himself. "Hold out your hand to me. The dead are exalted above all." But the Man with the Mask—the spirit of Life—is waiting. He curses Moritz as a lying phantom, a stinking breath of the grave. "Who are you?" asks Melchior, and the spirit of Life replies: "You cannot learn to know me until you trust yourself to me." Melchior follows him back to life, and Moritz returns to his grave with a smile.

These disconnected scenes, as I have set them down, bear little enough resemblance to the framework of a play. "Frühlings Erwachen," indeed, is only a group of such scenes of life and death. But one can forgive Wedekind much for having written it. He has realised the child mind, and made clear the gulf between parents and children where ignorance of sex is left to grope unaided. As a result, he has produced such a drama

of all-compelling force as can only be written once in a lifetime.

"Hidalla" shows the other side of Wedekind. Here he is fantastic, bitter, cynical, egoistic, without a touch of the delicacy that redeems "Frühlings Erwachen."

Karl Hetmann is the typical Wedekind hero; an ingenuous prophet buffeted by a world of the sophisticated. But what a world, and what a hero! Beside this bear-garden of "Hidalla," Shaw's "Misalliance" is polite and musical.

Hetmann is the founder and secretary of an "International Society for the Breeding of a New Race." Its watchword is beauty. Through beauty alone can men approach the gods. The members of the Society, then, are chosen solely from among persons of marked physical charm, and they must conform to certain rules. Hetmann summarises the conditions as follows:—

1. The object of the society is the breeding of a new race.

2. Within the society the bourgeois conventions of marriage and the family are suspended.

3. Every member has an inalienable right to the services of every other. Within the society all women are in subjection to men, and all men in subjection to women.

Complications, of course, follow immediately. The Society attracts a mob of promiscuists, free lovers, fools and idlers; empty-headed women and speculative business men eager to exploit it for their own purposes. Launhart, one of the latter, establishes a weekly journal as the Society's organ, and Hetmann contributes an article entitled "The Family Life of the Bourgeois Classes as compared with that of our Domestic Animals." The number in which the article appears is instantly confiscated by the police. Launhart, who as editor is legally responsible, makes a bolt of it; but Hetmann is arrested and sentenced to several months' imprisonment. The International Congress, arranged for the following week, is postponed indefinitely, and the Society itself becomes dormant.

Hetmann is a perfectly sincere fanatic. During his term of imprisonment he writes

a new book named "Hidalla, or the Gospel of Beauty," and upon his release he sets to work once more. Some illusions are gone, but his ideal remains. "I am not one of those men," he says, "who take leave of their hopes and dreams when they reach thirty. I am forty, and my dreams are more childlike, my expectations higher, my hopes more glorious than ever." His method is no longer agitation, but sacrifice.

Still he cannot escape notoriety. His views have become known as "the Hetmannite theory," and provide matter for the theses of young University men eager to obtain a doctorate. The journal of the Society has thrived upon confiscation, and now has a circulation of eighty thousand. Launhart has returned, and finds the editorship a gold-mine. Morosini, the Grand Master of the Society, has collected a large harem from among the members, and lives "like Mohammed in Paradise."

Hetmann is dragged into the propaganda of these vultures. They need him as an advertisement, and use him to create

a new sensation. Lectures are arranged for him. But he no longer endeavours to convert the members of his audience. He insults them, points out their own physical ugliness, and holds them up to contempt. His first lecture ends in a riot, and he barely escapes the mob. The effect of his appearance at the second is described as that of "a camel who treads upon an ant-heap." He is rescued in a somewhat battered state by the police, and placed once more under arrest; this time in order that inquiry may be made into his mental condition. For three months he remains in a lunatic asylum, and at the end of this time the mental specialists declare him sane. He is accordingly allowed to return home.

A further change, however, is now seen in his attitude. "In spite of my own convictions," he remarks "the doctors have declared me a sane man. . . . The more I reflect upon their verdict, the more overwhelming grows my belief that they are mistaken. . . . How can I be a normal man, seeing that from my earliest childhood I have found myself at every point

in antagonism with the normal world? . . . Is it conceivable that any of my views can ever be generally accepted? Take, for example, my assertion that the preservation of virginity as a marketable commodity is immoral. Can that ever be accepted as the utterance of a sane man?" Henceforth, he says, he will aim solely at maintaining his own personal freedom. Publicity, recognition, notoriety—these are only forms of tyranny. The world is sane. So be it. He will remain a free madman.

There is grim satire in this, but the grimmest of all is yet to come. A circus manager calls, with an offer. He will pay Hetmann five hundred marks a night to appear in his show as "dummer August." "Dummer August" is the clown of the German circus. His characteristics are that he "falls over every obstacle that is put in his way, always arrives just too late, always wants to help people who understand things ten times better than he does himself, and, above all, *that he never knows why the audience is laughing at him.*" In Hetmann's case, the manager thinks, no rehearsals will be necessary.

Hetmann accepts the offer, signs the contract, shows the delighted manager out, and then goes into the next room and hangs himself. So the apostle of beauty comes to an ugly end, and the curtain falls upon Launhart rummaging callously among his manuscripts in search of something to publish.

And the moral? Wedekind underlines the moral so heavily that it cannot be passed by. He finds life a hideous desert of advertisement, a noisy triumphal procession of charlatans. Who brays loudest holds the field. Ideas are powerless, because every idea is swamped by the folly or dishonesty of its adherents. This world belongs to the clown and the adventurer, not to the man of genius.

That is Wedekind's personal conviction. It may be justified. But in "Hidalla" he has not proved his case. Hetmann is not a man of genius. If he were, "Hidalla" would be a great tragedy. It falls short of greatness just in so far as Wedekind has failed to make Hetmann's personality convincing. It falls short of beauty just in so far as he has failed to

make Hetmann's aims sublime. The tragic idea is always a symbol. It stands for something accessible to the common experience of mankind. When Lear is flouted by his daughters we are moved to pity, but when Hetmann forms a Society for the Breeding of a New Race, delivers a lecture on the physical drawbacks of his audience, and gets a broken head, we are inclined to laugh. His aim is not inspiring. Wedekind, with all his satire, still takes Hetmann seriously. He tries to make a hero of his monomaniac; and he succeeds only in making a monomaniac of himself. "Hidalla" is like so many attempts at modern tragedy, from Bernard Shaw's "Doctor's Dilemma" to "The Seagull" of Anton Tchekhov. It would be great—but for its author.

For the rest, Wedekind's decline since "Frühlings Erwachen" is as clearly marked as Hauptmann's since "The Sunken Bell." The horrors of "Musik" and "Zensur" are not horrible; the erotic thrills of "Erdgeist" are not thrilling. It is certain that Wedekind aimed at something far above sensationalism in these

plays; but it is equally certain that the mark is never reached. His skill as a craftsman is not great enough to make them effective. "Oaha" (1909) may be set beside Hauptmann's "Griselda" of the same date, as representing what it is to be hoped will prove the low-water mark of German drama.

It cannot be said that as yet there are any clear signs of recovery. Among the Freie Bühne authors of 1889–95 Max Halbe and Otto Erich Hartleben adapted themselves to the popular Theatre, partly from natural inclination and partly from tactics. In the compromise they ceased to break new paths. Georg Hirschfeld wrote several interesting plays, "Agnes Jordan," "Pauline," and "Nebeneinander," before abandoning drama for the novel. Ludwig Thoma's comedy "Moral" is an impudent and amusing topical satire. The most hopeful of the newer dramatists is Josef Ruederer, a Bavarian, who has hitherto only produced two plays. One is "Die Fahnenweihe," a comedy of peasant life; the other "Die Morgenröte," a drama of the revolution of 1848 in Munich.

VI

ENGLAND

BERNARD SHAW, GRANVILLE BARKER, JOHN GALSWORTHY

To all outward appearance the English drama stands lower than any other in Europe. In Germany and Austria the theatre is a centre of thought; in France it has all the support of an established tradition, with a national playhouse and the recognition of an Academy of letters; while in Russia, Holland, Scandinavia and Italy, it exists largely upon the work of native dramatists who have themselves achieved a European reputation. In all of these countries (although least, perhaps, in France) the repertory system enables the "modern" playwright to obtain, not only a hearing, but a living. Published plays are widely read. Playgoing is a normal habit, and the Theatre is respected accordingly. Many playhouses are subsidised by the State or municipality. Others, especially

in the capital cities of the German provinces, are aided by the traditional patronage of a Court. Even without such assistance they are able to pay their way by giving an average of from ten to twenty performances to every play added to their repertory. A play which attains fifty performances is exceptionally successful. Twenty or thirty new pieces are produced in the course of a year by each theatre, and an opening can be found, therefore, for every type of work, from Shakespeare to the latest Parisian farce or Ibsen's "When We Dead Awaken." At the present time the stage of the German-speaking countries is held by more than three hundred playwrights, most of whom live by writing for the theatre alone. Works of especial interest are continually revived. The stock company offers security to the actor without overworking him, and the whole theatrical system is so knit together by the exchange of plays and players that it has all the efficiency of a gigantic trust without any of its disadvantages.

Contrast this for a moment with the state of affairs in England. The English

theatre, even on its practical side, is casual, slovenly and ill-balanced. It depends almost entirely upon London for its plays, and the provinces are compelled to put up with touring companies performing what are more or less accurately described as "West End successes." Permanent repertory theatres have only been established up to the present in Manchester, Glasgow, and Dublin, and they are of recent growth and privately subsidised. As for the ordinary theatre of the West End of London, its condition is nothing short of appalling. Rents and salaries are so high that no manager can afford to produce a play without at least a reasonable prospect of attracting a hundred thousand people during its two or three months' run. The actor may be thrown out of work indefinitely by the failure of a single piece; and his profession, at all events as far as the rank and file are concerned, is a particularly demoralising form of casual labour. The long-run system, with its necessity for "leading parts," stereotypes author, actor, and audience alike. Theatrical enterprise is notoriously a

gamble for all concerned, and the dramatist is compelled to join in the speculation in public taste. It is unnecessary to deal here with the authors who have dominated the West End stage during the past twenty years, for none of them can conceivably rank with the modern dramatists of the rest of Europe, and none (with the possible exception of Wilde) have contributed anything either to thought or to literature. At best they have only sustained a tradition of empty craftsmanship; at worst they have set themselves deliberately to debase an art.

The proof of all this may be found in the plays themselves. The vast majority of them, however successful, are forgotten by the Londoner within a few months, and they disappear even from the provincial touring companies in a year or two. They are no more than opportunist devices for filling a theatre for a certain period. The experimental theatres apart, it is hardly too much to say that the London stage has not produced a single work of distinction within recent years.

Nevertheless, a modern English drama

exists. It is not easily discoverable at the first glance. A visitor from abroad would search the autumn playbills of London for it in vain. It appears spasmodically, with many failures and disappointments. Its achievement is not uniformly high. It is hampered by all the difficulties outlined above, and it has not yet succeeded in gathering a reliable audience. It is altogether tentative, and tinged with more than a suspicion of a cult. Its most recent outbreak in Mr. Charles Frohman's Repertory Theatre of 1910 was in many respects a move backward rather than forward. As far as opportunity of expression is concerned, the modern drama in England stands very much in the same position as that of the rest of Europe in 1890. Intellectually it is far in advance.

I have touched briefly in an earlier chapter upon the establishment of the Independent Theatre in 1891, and of the Stage Society in 1899. Bernard Shaw's "Widowers' Houses" was the only important discovery of the Independent Theatre, and "Arms and the Man" was given at the Avenue Theatre in 1894.

Six of his other plays were produced by the Stage Society in its earlier seasons. In 1904 the Court Theatre was opened under the management of J. E. Vedrenne and Granville Barker, and it existed almost entirely (at least as far as the evening bill was concerned) on Bernard Shaw's plays. Between 1904 and 1907 "John Bull's Other Island," "Major Barbara," "The Doctor's Dilemma," and "The Philanderer" were given for the first time, and others were revived. New plays by John Galsworthy, St. John Hankin, Granville Barker and John Masefield were also produced. In the autumn of 1907 the Vedrenne-Barker management was transferred to the Savoy Theatre, and here, after producing Shaw's "Cæsar and Cleopatra" and "The Devil's Disciple," with John Galsworthy's "Joy," it came to an end. From 1907 to 1910 there was an interregnum, during which London was without a pioneer theatre open to the public, although in 1908 Shaw's "Getting Married" was given at the Haymarket. Meanwhile the Stage Society continued its work, and produced new pieces by

Charles McEvoy and Arnold Bennett. Miss Horniman established a repertory company at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, and the Scottish Repertory Theatre was formed in Glasgow. Early in 1910 Mr. Frohman opened a new repertory management at the Duke of York's Theatre, and the most important plays produced were John Galsworthy's "Justice," Bernard Shaw's "Misalliance," George Meredith's "The Sentimentalists," Granville Barker's "The Madras House," and Elizabeth Baker's "Chains."

Here, briefly outlined, is the history of the forward movement which constitutes, in itself, a proof of the existence of a modern English drama. Its value lies chiefly in its promise for the future, and in the stimulus which it gives to the foundation of repertory theatres throughout the country, as well as of a national theatre in London. I shall deal only with some of the authors already mentioned above.

Bernard Shaw.

Bernard Shaw is, beyond all doubt, the greatest individual force in European

drama since Ibsen. This is, I am aware, not the general English view. I believe it is not even Mr. Shaw's own view. With unusual modesty and some lack of judgment, he withdraws in favour of M. Brieux, a dramatist distinctly of the second rank. The fact remains, however, that Bernard Shaw is not only the most interesting of living playwrights, but the strongest personality and the clearest thinker. There is no dramatist writing to-day who is great in the sense in which Ibsen was great. There is no one possessed of overwhelming individual power and, at the same time, of supreme mastery of the theatre. Europe has to put up with one-sided authors, and to choose between the artist-philosopher who writes for the stage and the playwright-specialist who writes for nothing else. Since Sudermann and Pinero represent the latter class, the decision is clear enough. Shaw, Wedekind and Strindberg are triumphant. Better a single play like "Man and Superman" or "Frühlings Erwachen" than a thousand of the type of "Magda" or "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray." Better the

uncut brilliant than the polished scrap of paste.

Nevertheless, the choice remains a choice between two imperfections, and Bernard Shaw's outstanding position as dramatist is only comparative. His eminence is, as Renan said of Mill's, "largely due to the flatness of the surrounding country."

Let us try to gain a view of this eminence from the most convenient standpoint. Just as Shaw is more popular in Germany than in England, so it is only possible to judge of his work completely from the conning-tower of European criticism. His virtues are his own, but his failings are in the main the failings of all the greater dramatists of his period. Shaw's career hitherto has been curiously like that of Hauptmann, with whom, of all authors, he has at first sight least in common. His early play, "Widowers' Houses," like "The Weavers," was clearly the work of a revolutionist. Shaw afterwards turned to bitter social comedy in "The Philanderer"; just as Hauptmann did in "Kollege Crampton." Both were dis-

appointing to the Socialists in search of a dramatic leader. It would be straining analogy too far to set the touch of mystery in "Candida" against the dream-poem "Hannele," but Shaw unquestionably reached his height in "Man and Superman," just as Hauptmann reached his in the very different "Sunken Bell." Hauptmann's decline was the more rapid. The obscurity of his later plays is greater than that even of the trance scene in "Getting Married" (although this puzzled Berlin not a little). Fragments like "Elga" belong to the same category as "Press Cuttings" and "Blanco Posnet." Finally, in 1909, Hauptmann produced the lamentable "Griselda," and in 1910 Bernard Shaw brought consternation even to the straitest sect of the Shavians by his "Misalliance." Of the two men, it may be remarked, Shaw is only slightly the elder.

And the explanation? It is surely clear enough. Neither Shaw nor Hauptmann is a sufficiently great craftsman to surpass, or even to equal, the dramatic form which Ibsen's genius imposed upon the modern

Theatre. Both are original artists. Both endeavoured to discover new forms for their work, while lesser authors were content with sterile technique and commonplace; and both have failed in proportion as they have left the beaten path. Shaw ekes out his insufficiency of dramatic craft by the minutest stage directions, which appear at first sight to represent real technical skill; Hauptmann falls into the same habit. In "Rose Bernd," for example, he directs his characters to become "involuntarily pale as wax," "alternately suffused and pale," "ashen grey," "still paler," "trembling, and in perspiration," and so on. This type of descriptive writing belongs properly to the novel, not to the theatre. Technique and stage direction have nothing in common. Technique helps to create drama; stage directions only smooth the way of the actor and the reader.

Hauptmann, however, has no gift of sophistry, and he has not attempted to describe his failure as a success; while Shaw proclaimed recently that "Misalliance" represented a return to the Greek

form of drama, on the singularly inadequate ground that it observed the unities of time and place. In point of fact, this play does not represent a return to Greek or any other form of drama. Its form is non-existent, its effect chaotic, and its substance a prolonged intellectual caterwaul.

I return to the original proposition: that Bernard Shaw, judged by his work as a whole, is the greatest individual force in modern drama. This is enunciated (in spite of the modesty referred to above) in his Prefaces; it is proved in the plays themselves. They reveal an extraordinarily complex personality; a logician and pamphleteer; a wit keen enough successfully to break a lance with civilisation, yet deft and light of touch enough to be mistaken at first glance for a cynic; and withal first and foremost a sincere malcontent, a fine, passionate hater of things as they are. Ethically, then, he is a great crusader. No one can read "Major Barbara" without feeling that it is inspired. "True and inspired," Shaw himself claims; but the truth is another matter. In a work of art truth depends, not upon intention,

but achievement. Intellectually, too, a master. I take three outstanding examples: the Hell scene in "Man and Superman"; the conception of heroes in Cæsar and Napoleon, with the exposure of the futility of mere "will to power"; and the sweeping destruction of pose in "Arms and the Man." Add the close of the preface to "Plays Pleasant," and the series is complete:—

> Idealism, which is only a flattering name for romance in politics and morals, is as obnoxious to me as romance in ethics or religion. In spite of a Liberal Revolution or two, I can no longer be satisfied with fictitious morals and fictitious good conduct, shedding fictitious glory on robbery, starvation, disease, crime, drink, war, cruelty, cupidity, and all the other commonplaces of civilisation which drive men to the theatre to make foolish pretences that such things are progress, science, morals, religion, patriotism, imperial supremacy, national greatness and all the other names the newspapers call them. On the other hand, I see plenty of good in the world working itself out as fast as the idealists will allow it; and if they would only let it alone and learn to respect reality, which would include

> the beneficial exercise of respecting themselves, and incidentally respecting me, we should all get along much better and faster. At all events, I do not see moral chaos and anarchy as the alternative to romantic convention; and I am not going to pretend that I do merely to please the people who are convinced that the world is only held together by the force of unanimous, strenuous, eloquent, trumpet-tongued lying. To me the tragedy and comedy of life lie in the consequences, sometimes terrible, sometimes ludicrous, of our persistent attempts to found our institutions on the ideals suggested to our imaginations by our half-satisfied passions, instead of on a genuinely scientific natural history. And with that hint as to what I am driving at, I withdraw and ring up the curtain.

This overture is admirable in its summary of the themes which follow. No other dramatist could have stated them so forcibly, and if the wind instruments tend to drown the strings, that is the penalty of a wild Valkyrie ride against civilisation and all its works. The power is there. Shaw rides the whirlwind and directs the storm.

So far, then, his is programme music for

the brass band. And the symphony? The rhapsody? The concerto? The delicately adjusted score of the artist craftsman? Here the trouble begins. Shaw understands the aim of drama; he has defined it, discussed it, analysed it. He has provided criticism with a whole armoury of weapons, and some of them must be turned against himself. In an earlier passage of the preface to "Plays Pleasant," for example, he remarks :—

> When a comedy is performed, it is nothing to me that the spectators laugh. Any fool can make an audience laugh. I want to see how many of them, laughing or grave, are in the melting mood.

That "melting mood" is the test of all drama. It does not depend upon any one emotion. It may be called into being by the triumphant fanfare of the bugle, or the rhythmic sway of the violins, or the tremulous sweetness of the flute. It is yielding and yet inexorable. It judges the dramatist with the simplicity of a child, and yet with the sternness of unchanging law. Dialectics and sentimentality leave

it unmoved, but it vibrates to beauty like an echo.

How often, in all his plays, has Bernard Shaw called forth the melting mood? The passages can almost be counted upon the fingers of one hand. At the close of the second and fourth acts of "Mrs. Warren's Profession"; momentarily in "Candida," "Cæsar and Cleopatra," and "The Devil's Disciple"; oftener in the first two acts of "Major Barbara" and in "John Bull's Other Island"; once in "The Doctor's Dilemma"—not in the deathbed scene, but upon the terrace at Richmond. In the later plays, never. The "conversation in three acts," the "debate in one sitting," and the "sermon in crude melodrama" may titillate the intellect, but they fail to arouse emotion. They stand condemned by their author.

I take one other sentence from the preface quoted above:—

> To me the tragedy and comedy of life lie in the consequences, sometimes terrible, sometimes ludicrous, of our persistent attempts to found our institutions on the ideals suggested to our imaginations by our

half-satisfied passions, instead of on a genuinely scientific natural history.

The *tragedy* of life, let it be noted. Shaw has made one attempt to write a tragedy in "The Doctor's Dilemma," and he has failed utterly. The dying artist Dubedat is not a tragic figure; there is no greatness in him. He is a more egregious poseur than Sergius in "Arms and the Man," or Napoleon in "The Man of Destiny." His death is a harlequinade. His final speech is a dialectical adventure, a proclamation of belief in "Michael Angelo . . . the majesty of colour and the might of design." Life must first be made real before death can be made tragic. And Dubedat is never real. There is no more life in him than in the ventriloquist's dummy. He sits upon his maker's knee, mouthing phrases as the strings are pulled, grinning pertly at the gods. . . .

I turn to the question of passion. Drama is a symphony of the passions. The melting mood is their sway of the hearer. Shaw's plays have one passion, and one only — that of indignation. Indignation against hypocrisy and lying,

against prostitution and slavery, against poverty, dirt and disorder. John Tanner's whirling arms sweep the field. The bubble of pomposity is neatly pricked; it bursts in a glittering shower, leaving Roebuck Ramsden annihilated. Mrs. Warren, too, brims over with fine indignation—although some of it rings a little false. [The view of her profession as created solely by poverty and economic stress is only the respectable propagandist view. "It's not work that any woman would do for pleasure, goodness knows; though to hear the pious people talk you would suppose it was a bed of roses." This passage ought surely to belong to the Plays for Puritans. Wedekind goes deeper into the same subject; his "Erdgeist" presents the other side.]

Keegan's indignation in "John Bull's Other Island" is subtler and finer, but it remains the same passion. And so with Larry Doyle. Who but Shaw could have built the first act of a play out of his conversation with Broadbent, with no material but stupid English good-nature on the one hand and fierce Irish indignation on the

other? Or take Morell and Eugene Marchbanks in "Candida." A conflict of two wills, of two individualities? There is no point of contact. The person of Candida is only the apparent issue; actually she is always a spectator. The conflict is between two indignations; Morell's directed against the loafer as a part of the world's waste, Eugene's against sermons and scrubbing-brushes. The same struggle arises in "You Never Can Tell." Crampton is indignant with his family; the family is indignant with him. Gloria is indignant with Valentine, McComas with the twins. The cross-currents make all the drama of the play. The first act of "Major Barbara," again, depends upon Lady Britomart, who is indignation incarnate. In the second we find Shirley indignant with society, Bill Walker with the Salvation Army, Barbara with the munificent Bodger and his whisky. The third act passes in a refinement of discussion. Undershaft is never passionate. He translates his indignation first into a creed of life, then into terms of efficiency.

How does Shaw succeed in making drama of this solitary passion? The recipe is all his own. He makes the indignation palatable by his wit. The outburst creates a finely effective moment, and the Shavian drama is no more than a series of such moments. Persiflage links them together and weaves illusion. The wealth of criticism of life in the abstract drowns for the instant the hearer's criticism of life in the concrete as presented upon the stage. This effect, however, cannot always be sustained. The conversations and debates which followed "Major Barbara" have added nothing to Shaw's work as a whole. They have only exposed its weaknesses. The much-advertised new form proved to be no more than an anti-climax. It was as if the expert conjurer should appear before the curtain just to show "how it is done," exhibiting the marked cards, the rabbit up his sleeve, the box with a false bottom and the mysterious silken handkerchief. Not that these tools of the trade are necessarily despicable. The dramatist, like any other craftsman, is entitled to use all the exist-

ing devices and to invent others if he can. Intrinsically they are worth precisely their weight in illusion. But illusion without drama is impossible. Even the Shavian wit cannot make bricks without straw.

To sum up. Shaw's service to drama is first and foremost the revelation of a personality engaged in criticism of life. With one passion and much wit he has given this criticism dramatic force. Secondly, he has created more vivid individual types than any other living author. The Shaw woman and the Shaw boy, the Shaw middle-aged fool and the Shaw revolutionist, the Shaw preacher of efficiency and the Shaw saviour of souls, the Show poseur and the Shaw anti-romanticist, represent phases of common human experience. Phases only, for they are types of reality intellectualised. There is no complete portrait that can be called great. There is none of that "broad Alpine survey of the Comic Spirit," extolled by Meredith in the preface to "The Egoist," which, while it "watches over sentimentalism with a birch-rod," is nevertheless "not opposed to romance."

Shaw's comic spirit must be writ small; it has a narrow range. But (to quote further from the same prelude) it "proposes the correcting of pretentiousness, of inflation, of dulness, and of the vestiges of rawness and grossness to be found among us." With that we must perforce be content.

Granville Barker.

In the Shavian drama there are no heroes. Bluntschli triumphs over Sergius; Marchbanks demoralises Morell; even John Tanner is put out of countenance by Straker, and in spite of Keegan Broadbent conquers Ireland. Shaw tore the hero limb from limb, and Mr. Barker is engaged in piecing him together once again. But what a hero! He has been reconstructed upon strictly Shavian lines, dispassionately and without romance. At present he appears something of an invalid; pallid, barely convalescent, bloodless, hobbling upon the crutches of intellect into the consulting-room of wit. He suffers from a superfluity of grey matter. And his name is Edward Voysey Trebell Philip

Madras. (Note the Edward and the Philip: they are men of open mind.)

Will the patient recover? That is a vital question for the English drama. The classical Shavian feeding-cup has given out, and of late he has been nourished upon questionable patent medicines, from "Getting Married" to "Press Cuttings." "Misalliance" was a bitter draught, and its only effect seems to have been to make him more loquacious. Recently he entered "The Madras House" at the rise of the curtain, planted himself with his back to the fire and his hands in his coat-tails, and remarked, "Well, Tommy, what are the two most important things in a man's life? His attitude towards money and his attitude towards women." That is Edward Voysey Trebell Philip Madras all over. He is conscientiously, perseveringly, even laboriously engaged in discovering—an attitude. Not a pose (for Edward-Philip is always sincere) but a point of view, a philosophy. This in itself differentiates him from the characters of Shaw, and acquits Mr. Barker of the charge of mere imitation.

In " The Voysey Inheritance " Edward-Philip's problem was one of personal and family honour. He attacked it patiently, but it cannot be said that he solved it. The truth is that the hero of " The Voysey Inheritance " never counts for very much. The play is chiefly remarkable for its extraordinarily vivid portrait of an English middle-class family. Its appearance was a landmark in realist drama.

In " Waste " Edward-Philip had leapt from the solicitor's office to the Cabinet, and was occupied in disestablishing the Anglican Church. The project was destroyed by a passing intimacy with a woman, and Trebell shot himself. If the Disestablishment ideal had been more convincing, " Waste " would have been a great tragedy. As it is, Trebell remains the backbone of Edward Voysey Trebell Philip Madras.

In his reincarnation in " The Madras House " we find him, appropriately enough, a few rungs lower upon the political ladder. Philip Madras is merely a candidate for the London County Council. His attitude towards the world

in general is vaguer than in "Waste": his attitude towards women an affair of groping generalities, typically expressed in the phrase "I hate this farmyard world of sex." A reminiscence of the Disestablishment catastrophe seems to linger here. Moreover, Philip Madras apparently had the misfortune to marry the heroine of "The Voysey Inheritance" in the person of Jessica, and the further misfortune of failing to inherit his father Constantine's polygamous instincts. Hence his somewhat querulous speeches. Once again he drops back into the position of the hero who doesn't matter.

He remains the hero, however. Edward-Philip is always intimately personal in his attitudes. He is Mr. Barker's Old Man of the Sea. He must bestride every play with a politely inquisitive air, merging occasionally into the half-defiant dogmatism of uncertainty. In the Dumas-Sudermann-Pinero school of comedy the hero says little, but acts heroically. Eloquence is left to the raisonneur. Mr. Barker, by fusing the two, has invented a new stage type, the hero-raisonneur, a

person who does little, but talks heroically. He has not yet shown that the new type is better than the old. The raisonneur as middle-aged moralist and universal purveyor of popular philosophy is now happily almost extinct. The length of his speeches was only equalled by the largeness of his heart. It was his function to radiate optimism in thought, sentimentality in feeling. He had one great advantage, however. He recognised the existence of emotion, passion and romance as realities to other people, if not to himself; and he contemplated them from the standpoint of reasonableness. Mr. Barker's attempt to Shavianise him and to renew his youth must fail. Edward Voysey Trebell Philip Madras regards himself and every one else from the standpoint of pure reason. His passions are confined strictly to the Ethical Church and the London County Council. Sex is merely a physical fact which gets in his way from time to time and threatens to make shipwreck of efficiency. He contemplates emotion in general with cold distaste. Theoretically, as an educated citizen of the late

Edwardian era, he believes in the equality of men and women. Actually nothing would suit him better than that women should be restricted to the harem. His philosophy is at war with expediency, not with feeling. He thrusts at the world with all the brutality of pure intellect, then recoils querulously to make up his mind. The attitude remains undiscovered. That is the history of the hero-raisonneur.

Let us glance at the other characters, especially at Mr. Barker's women. They are all passionless. Only rarely do they give way even to Shavian indignation. They seem to say, "We are rational people. We are open to conviction. We have read Bernard Shaw. We belong to a period. We are persons of taste. We dislike this disorderly world and we are endeavouring to create an attitude towards it." There are exceptions. Ann Leete and the gardener, for example. Why did Ann Leete marry the gardener? Why did the gardener marry Ann Leete? They cannot quite explain. They have no conscious attitude. That is not necessarily their misfortune. Can it be

altogether accidental that in the final scene of this first play, where the gardener lights Ann up the cottage stairs upon the marriage night, Mr. Barker gave us a touch of beauty that he has never since attained? That was before the days of Edward Voysey Trebell Philip Madras. As for the remaining characters, we must agree with them. They are eminently rational.

John Galsworthy.

Mr. Galsworthy has reaffirmed the existence of the common man; an individual long ignored upon the English stage. The West End society drama had no place for him. The man in the drawing-room is not upon speaking terms with the man in the street. Epigrammatic comedy gave him no part, for the common man does not deal in epigrams. The music halls burlesqued him, figuring him only with a battered silk hat, a red nose and a pair of parti-coloured trousers. Even melodrama failed to represent him fairly, for the common man is not addicted

to crime. Bernard Shaw, engaged in bombarding the very civilisation in which the common man believes, burlesqued him as completely as the music hall, stuffed him with persiflage to bursting point, and hurled him at the social order as a new weapon of offence.

At this point Mr. Galsworthy arrived. To all appearance he might never have read a line of Shaw, but he had just as little in common with Sir Arthur Pinero. The Court Theatre opened its doors and Mr. Galsworthy walked in. He proceeded at once to set up his pair of scales upon the stage and to test the social values. In the one pan a Liberal member of Parliament and his son; in the other Mrs. Jones, the charwoman, and her husband. As a makeweight the silver box. Here we see at once that inter-penetration of classes which distinguishes Mr. Galsworthy. As in the novel "Fraternity," and the plays "Strife" and "Justice," he refuses to accept the class divisions which separate ordinary West End drama from life as a whole. He takes up the floor of the drawing-room

and shows us the kitchen. He examines the psychology of the butler as minutely as that of the member of Parliament. He follows the charwoman home to her tenement dwelling. He gives us the history of her husband in search of work. He introduces the solicitor, the detective, the prostitute. He accompanies the police-court missionary upon his rounds. He sits upon the bench with the magistrate. Each of these persons moves upon a separate daily round, a separate social plane; but he brings them all together and makes drama of their lives. Briefly, his case is this. No one can live his own life merely by virtue of possessing a thousand a year. No class can seal itself hermetically from others. Mrs. Jones' children will come and cling to the railings of the area, and even through the closed window their crying can be heard. One day there arises a petty complication, a workmen's strike, a moment of folly or crime, and the sky-scraper civilisation collapses. We are all on the ground floor together, scrambling. The graduated coinage of society is in the melting-pot.

Interest fights interest upon common ground.

Upon that common ground stands Mr. Galsworthy with his pair of scales. He is scrupulously fair. Even in a drama of the vices no virtue escapes his notice. No individual is altogether a blackguard. "The Silver Box," in some respects the most one-sided of his plays, shows this discrimination clearly. The Liberal member of Parliament means well. If he does not understand Jones' unemployment, at least he is always prepared to "ask a question in the House." His wife is unscrupulous, but only in defence of her son. The son himself, although a vicious type, is amiable enough. He has a rudimentary notion of playing the game. Jones did not steal the silver box; he "took it" half-contemptuously while he was in liquor. The magistrate is kindly. The police-court trial is as fair as it can humanly be considering the balance of interests. Jones is sent to prison, it is true, in order to prevent a newspaper scandal. But "one law for the rich and another for the poor" is not

merely a propagandist cry; it is a platitude. The trial scene is as mechanically inevitable as all the forces which move Mr. Galsworthy's characters. The limitations of free will are narrow. In a social crisis the common man is helpless. He must accept his fate for good or evil. "The Silver Box" is an indictment of society, although not one of its characters would accept it as such. It is more than an indictment—a complete trial, in which Mr. Galsworthy appears both for the prosecution and the defence.

In "Joy" he failed because the subject did not suit him. Still the balance of pleading is honourably adjusted. On the one hand the mother of middle age with a lover; on the other the daughter who cannot comprehend until she, too, discovers romance. In "Strife" he returned to social drama on the larger scale. Here class meets class once more. A strike of quarrymen brings them together. The conflict appears at first sight individual, for two figures, the chairman of the employing firm and the leader of the strikers, stand out clearly from the rest.

Actually neither drives. Both are driven. "Strife," like "Justice" and "The Silver Box," is an interplay of forces rather than of persons. The collective will to resist concentrates upon either hand in the strongest individuality. In the quarrymen's leader it is active; in the old employer obstinate and passive. The lesser characters propose compromise, offer sympathy, attempt reconciliation; but the forces are too strong for them. The play ends with a settlement which might have been made at the beginning. The balance remains steady.

In "Justice" the scales are loaded. Mr. Galsworthy is as fair as ever to individuals, but he attacks deliberately a part of the social system that they have created. In the first act we learn that William Falder, a clerk in a lawyer's office, has stolen eighty-one pounds for the purpose of carrying off the woman whom he loves and rescuing her from a brutal husband. He is found out, arrested and sentenced to three years' penal servitude at the following assizes. The third act shows him in solitary confinement,

and in the fourth, returning to the world after two years on ticket-of-leave, he finds conditions against him, is arrested again for forging testimonials, and commits suicide. That is, baldly stated, the history of William Falder. He is no heroic figure pursued by Fate; nothing but a pitiful creature who is not wanted, an unsolved problem in a world too busy with its own affairs to study him. It is his life that is pitiful; his death brings nothing but a feeling of intense relief.

Mr. Galsworthy has named this play a tragedy. Just as Mr. Barker has created a new type in the hero-raisonneur, so he has created a new form in the tragedy without a hero. There is not a single person in "Justice" whose removal could be a loss to the world in any but a limited personal sense; no one (with the possible exception of the counsel for the defence) who could conceivably entertain a universally valuable idea; no one with the individual power and passion which alone can give inspiration to drama. Lawyers and clerks, judge, jury and officers of the court; governor, warders and chaplain of

the prison—they all exist by the thousand, and they could all be replaced a hundred times a day. They go about their work as slaves of inexorable law. Their human feelings, their kindliness and sympathy, are the emotions of people who, in the midst of a world unknown, and therefore presumably hostile, find two friendly camps of men and women like-minded to themselves—the family and the office—and cling to both as instinctively as sheep huddle beneath a hedge for shelter from the drifting snow. There is no colour, no mystery, no surprise about them. We can see not only their part in the passing incidents of the play, but the whole round of their lives. They may be interesting or uninteresting personally, but their chief business in life is to be a part of the social machinery. William Falder is one of them. He becomes entangled in the machinery, and it crushes him. The process is as mechanical as an execution. One feels that it is inhuman, barbaric, detestable; but never that it is tragic. It arouses anger and pity, not inspiration. And inspiration is the test of tragedy. In

the conflict of gods and men the sense of the tragic depends upon the greatness of the protagonists. He who fights well cannot but die nobly. Mr. Galsworthy's Falder does not fight at all, and he dies like a rat in a trap.

It should be the tritest commonplace to say that no playwright can make great drama out of little people. The naturalistic drama has had opportunities enough in Europe during the past thirty years, and it has justified itself only in proportion as it has created exceptional figures and splashed the grey background of actuality with living colours; in proportion, that is to say, as it has become unnaturalistic. Its naturalism is then only external. Mr. Galsworthy's is internal. The characters of "Justice" are grey at heart. The play has many extraordinarily moving passages. It is a fine destructive attack upon solitary confinement as a part of the prison system, but it is not a tragedy, and it is not great drama. Mr. Galsworthy has a place of his own upon the modern stage. Every play of his has a strongly marked individual atmosphere; his characters are

distinctive without being distinguished. He understands the limitations of the theatre as well as its advantages, and he has never sacrificed drama to dialectics. At the beginning of the newer movement the English theatre was out of touch alike with art, with ideas and with actual life. The latter two are only accessories—but let that pass. Bernard Shaw and Mr. Barker brought the ideas; in a measure, too, the art. Mr. Galsworthy's preoccupation is with actuality. A gulf still remains.

VII

AUSTRIA

SCHNITZLER AND HOFMANNSTHAL

Arthur Schnitzler

The Austrian and the German drama are often confused. In reality, they have nothing in common but language, and the difference between them may be measured by the difference between the spirit of Berlin and the spirit of Vienna. The German playwrights reflect phases of their national temperament clearly enough. Sudermann, for example, is always heavily Prussian. The stucco palaces of "Die Ehre" and "Sodoms Ende" belong essentially to upper middle class Berlin; the farms and country houses of "Johannisfeuer" and "Das Glück im Winkel" are as distinctively North German as their pastors are Protestant. Hauptmann's legendary plays are built of German mythology, and even his Silesian peasant

dramas gravitate naturally towards the Northern capital. Wedekind's laborious introspection and substantial satire are German to the core.

Schnitzler is just as distinctively Austrian. Dramatically Berlin belongs to the *bourgeoisie;* Vienna is a city of the aristocrats. Schnitzler, like most of the modern Viennese playwrights, is content to take as his theme only a few scenes from life, and even in those few scenes he recurs continually to a single passage. No wind instruments for him; he is a master of the strings. To the Northern playwrights he leaves the wild barbaric march, to the Maeterlinckian symbolists the tone-poem. His dramatic method is the intellectualisation, the refinement of the Viennese waltz. The most famous of his plays is "Liebelei" (in the English version "Light o' Love," literally "Flirtation"). But in reality they are all Liebelei, from "Anatol" to the "Komtesse Mizzi." The moralist will find "flirtation" a euphemism, but Schnitzler has nothing to do with moralists or morality. His subject is always the same—the lover and

a mistress or two. It is treated gracefully enough, with little passion and much gentle melancholy, little humour and much wit. His power lies chiefly in the creation of an atmosphere—a dim twilight atmosphere as of autumn evenings crowded with reminiscence. It is indescribably charming and completely aimless; a dream world as magical as that of any symbolist, yet unsymbolic. Tragic problems arise from time to time, as in "Der einsame Weg" or "Der Ruf des Lebens," but for the most part Schnitzler moves upon the plane of comedy. The crisis arrives, the catastrophe occurs; but it is an intimately personal catastrophe, accepted with ironical resignation by the aristocrat-hero, and added with a sigh to his repertory of experience. That aristocrat-hero is Schnitzler's most characteristic figure. "New mistresses for old" is his eternal problem, and an imp is ever at his elbow, whispering that the old were better. Still he must obey the law of his own nature, and he accepts the necessity of change as he accepts all else in his life, good-naturedly. The women come and

go. They arrive timidly, half-conscious only of their power. They yield, and for a while some tiny raftered room with latticed windows, discreetly hidden in a narrow by-way of the city, is made the meeting-place. Freshly gathered flowers are arranged upon the table, set for two. The lamp is lit, the curtains are drawn. The old housekeeper, discreeter even than her dwelling, moves noiselessly to serve the dishes and withdraws. The two are left together; a gentleman of upper-class Vienna, a lady of any class, or none. "We have seen this comedy before," you say at first. "It is sordid, sensuous, contemptible." It is none of these, for Schnitzler is a magician. An honourable magician, moreover. His work is never ugly. He avoids sensuality by his honesty as an artist. There is nothing unnatural, nothing immoral, nothing even furtive for him in the relationship of lover and mistress. A certain discretion is preserved —that is all. He traces the psychology of the intimacy. Within the limits he has chosen for himself, he tells everything that can be told, and much that the lesser

artist is afraid to tell. Details of circumstance are nothing to him, moods everything. His drama depends upon a crisis in the lives of two people; the inevitable passing from old relationships to new. No flash of thought escapes him. He records every motive. In the crisis itself there can be no compromise. The break must come when one of the lovers desires it, however faintly. As long as Romance spreads her wings, the intimacy lasts; the instant they are folded it must come to an end at whatever cost of suffering. That is the first condition of equality between men and women; a brutal condition, but one which must be faced. In the moment of parting pity is a dishonourable emotion, chivalry the grossest form of patronage, sentimentality a nauseous drug. Even the most cynical frankness is fairer, and that is Schnitzler's weapon. He analyses the transition moment in scenes such as those of "Anatol." Outwardly, between the lovers, all is just as it was upon the first evening; inwardly everything is changed. The man must be free. Conversation grows lame. At last the

explanation comes, and the woman departs ; sometimes with frankly outstretched hand and a glance of understanding, sometimes helplessly in tears or riotously in a storm of indignation. For these latter types the man has only a shrug of the shoulders as he lights a cigarette. They offend his sense of decorum and compel him to regard them as inferiors. For the others he bears a touch of melancholy as a sign of mourning. He will think of them in future twilight moods. . . . But a few weeks later he will hire a new room in another by-way (not the same room, for that would be unbeautiful) for the reception of another mistress, and the old light o' love will pass to a new lover. There are the Schnitzler hero and the Schnitzler heroine. They have most of the vices of their city and the quintessence of its charm ; frivolity tinged with regret and intrigue with grace.

I have touched here especially upon the types and the setting of the one-act cycle "Anatol" because they convey the Schnitzler atmosphere most clearly. The situations are not literally rendered ; they

change just as moods change, and are woven into different forms. "Anatol" represents the comedy of the lover-mistress motive, "Liebelei" the tragedy. In the former the man is the central figure; in the latter the woman. In "Liebelei" Christine meets her philanderer, and makes a hero of him. She becomes his mistress, and lives on in a dream-world of her own. Her hero is killed in a duel fought on behalf of another woman—and that is all. Of Christine it can only be said that she is as great a woman as is possible in the Schnitzler world: a world devised for men as surely as that of Strindberg, and in effect, although unconsciously, as contemptuous of women. The misogynist, indeed, is a lesser enemy of feminism than the philanderer. He is only the mouthpiece of ideas, not the arbiter of fates.

"Liebelei" was followed by the longer plays "Freiwild" and "Das Vermächtnis." They represent the nearest approach that Austrian drama has made to the social problem play and the modernity movement of other countries. In social

problems, however, Schnitzler is really out of his element. He has satirised the duel a thousand times more subtly than Sudermann in "Die Ehre"; he has ridiculed militarism, semitism, and anti-semitism, the government and the revolutionary parties. But his interests are not primarily political or social, any more than they are domestic. In "Reigen" he returns to the drama of personal moods. "Anatol" consists of seven scenes, "Reigen" of ten, a complete cycle of duologues, each between a man and a woman. More than duologues, however: scenes from life. They pass consecutively: A prostitute and a soldier. The soldier and a parlourmaid. The parlourmaid and a young gentleman. The young gentleman and a young lady. The young lady and her husband. The husband and a girl. The girl and a poet. The poet and an actress. The actress and a nobleman. The nobleman and the prostitute.

There is the chain, stripped of the romance of "Anatol" and reduced to a vivisection of sex instinct, a post-mortem

examination of passion. It is the work of an artist weary of many adventures, and disposed to regard life as nothing but a round of stupid intrigue and cynical reaction.

For the rest, Schnitzler has gone no further dramatically than "Anatol" and "Liebelei." The one-act cycles "Lebendige Stunden" and "Marionetten" are new versions of the old story. "Komtesse Mizzi" (1909) has all the old charm and nothing more. One can have too much of the twilight mood, the Viennese lover and his mistress, the melancholy and the grace. Everything that Schnitzler has written or imagined is summed up in the six hundred pages of his novel "Der Weg ins Freie." There is the search for the "path of freedom" that he has never found. He has never made his way out of the half-world into the real world. But among the dramatists of the half-world he is supreme.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal

Not long ago a provincial theatre was opened in Germany with the inscription

upon its proscenium: "Goethe, Hauptmann, Schiller, von Hofmannsthal." This was something more than a Pan-Germanic fanfare. It meant that in the eyes of a vast number of people Hauptmann and Hugo von Hofmannsthal are already canonised among the classic poets. Let us examine Hofmannsthal's claim. He published his first work in 1891—at the period, that is to say, of the Freie Bühne in Berlin and the independent Ibsenite theatres in the rest of Europe. He had nothing to do with Ibsenism or "movements," however, and very little to do with the theatre. He was only seventeen years of age, and the influence under which he had come was not that of the new *bourgeois* drama (the term is used in no sense of abuse) of Ibsen and Hauptmann, but that of Italian art. He was known at this time under the pseudonym of "Loris," and many guesses were made at his identity. Hermann Bahr, the Viennese critic and playwright, set him down at first as a Frenchman writing in the German language. Upon the assurance that "Loris" was an Austrian, he

imagined him to be a diplomat-nobleman, occupied, perhaps, in the Austrian Legation in Paris, and at fifty years of age familiar enough with the world and its literature. The illusion was disturbed by "Loris" himself, who introduced himself one day in the café, and proved to be a youth of nineteen. In addition to many poems and essays, he had already published two complete verse-dramas, "Gestern," the scene of which is laid "in the time of the great painters," and "Der Tod des Tizian." Hofmannsthal's reaction against modern realism, then, although an unconscious reaction, dates from even earlier than the symbolism of Maeterlinck and the Théâtre de l'Œuvre. He turned deliberately to a more heroic age in search of beauty.

The verse is, of course, untranslateable. Without disrespect to Mr. Arthur Symons' version of "Elektra," it must be remarked that only once in a millennium can a Schlegel be found to translate a Shakespeare, and that for the most part poets are better left to their own language. With Hofmannsthal, who is as Viennese

as Schnitzler in the delicacy of his moods and atmosphere, translation must always be something of a travesty. I take one passage from " Gestern " :—

Heut' ist ein Tag Corregios, reif erglühend,
In ganzen Farben lachend, prangend, bilühend,
Heut' ist ein Tag der üppigen Magnolien,
Der schwellenden, der reifen Zentifolien ;
Heut' nimm dein gelbes Kleid, das schwere, reiche,
Und dunkelrote Rosen, heisse, weiche. . . .
Verlerntest du am Gestern nur zu halten,
Auf dieses Toten hohlen Ruf zu lauschen ;
Lass dir des Heute wechselnde Gewalten,
Genuss und Qualen durch die Seele rauschen,
Vergiss das Unverständliche, das war :
Das Gestern lügt, und nur das Heut'ist wahr!
Lass dich von jedem Augenblicke treiben,
Das ist der Weg, dir selber treu zu bleiben.
Der Stimmung folg, die deiner niemals harrt,
Gib dich ihr hin, so wirst du dich bewahren.
Vor ausgelebten drohen dir Gefahren :
Und Lüge wird die Wahrheit, die erstarrt!

Two lines here :—

Heut' nimm dein gelbes Kleid, das schwere, reiche,
Und dunkelrote Rosen, heisse, weiche. . . .

are especially characteristic of the poet, as much in the image they convey as in their strangely haunting melody. The heavy yellow robe, the dark red roses, may appear to recall the Wilde-Beardsley school; but Hofmannsthal, even in his earlier work, is never a decadent. Like Schnitzler, he throws a veil of melancholy over his characters; that is all. They are the types of "Anatol," transferred to mediæval Florence, and grown more passionate and lyrical. Both melody and image show an extraordinarily fastidious choice of words; and that is the most distinctive gift of this poet-prodigy, who at seventeen could absorb the art of centuries and realise the emotions of a lifetime. There is little dramatic power in "Gestern," and hardly more in "Der Tod des Tizian." Both are records of the first impressions of an artist—first love, the first creative impulse and the first glimpse of Italy. Even in the very names of their characters—Desiderio, Fortunio, Vespasiano, Fantasio, Tizianello and the rest—they are musical.

Hofmannsthal's next play was "Der

Tor und der Tod" (1893). The speeches here are measured; there is no overflow of rhetoric, and the verse, in its form, its substance and even its rhythm of sound, moves into step with drama. The scene is a room looking out upon a balcony and an Italian garden. "Death and the Fool" is the subject. Claudio, the Fool, has lost his personality in egoism, drowned his perceptions in artificiality, and strangled his passions by self-analysis. He is gifted, but from lack of feeling he has never used his gifts. Death comes to claim him; Death with a violin. Claudio is overwhelmed; he cannot believe that his hour has come. He awakens to realities; he wants life, love, pain and pleasure—but, above all, life! A procession passes through the room—his dead mother, his dead mistress, his dead friend. While they lived they were nothing to him. A Fool in the Scriptural sense, this; his granary filled with never-tasted corn. In the moment of death he understands, but it is too late: "Within the room all is still. Death is seen to pass the window, playing upon his violin.

After him pass the mother and the mistress, and close upon their heels a figure bearing the likeness of Claudio."

There is the tragedy of the Fool. It is a little play of rare beauty. Written before he was twenty years of age, it marks the close of what for Hofmannsthal must be called his youthful period. The treatment alone distinguishes him very clearly both from Wilde and from the French symbolists.

A number of short dramatic poems followed between 1895 and 1899, among them "Die Frau im Fenster," "Der Kaiser und die Hexe," "Das Kleine Welttheater" and "Das Bergwerk in Falun." Longer pieces are "Die Hochzeit der Sobeïde" and "Der Abenteurer und die Sängerin." For the most part these are only exercises in drama, some of them effective, all of them exquisitely written. They are still inspired by Italy, but a gradual change of tone is noticeable which seems to show that Hofmannsthal's later choice of Greek tragedy in "Elektra" and "Oedipus" was no haphazard choice of a poet at a loss for subject-matter.

What is most important, however, in these earlier works is not their plot (always of the slightest), nor even the decorative beauty of their language (as well suited, in itself, to a volume of poems as to drama), but their constant striving after new verse-forms for the theatre. All writers of verse-drama have made use of a change of rhyme or metre in order to obtain a certain dramatic effect. Among the most familiar examples are the rhymed couplet of the Shakespearean plays, used to round off a speech or to add an air of finality at the close of a scene, and the change from verse to prose in certain passages. Hofmannsthal uses both devices freely, but in other respects he goes much further than any poet before him. His verse changes its form continually. It is like a mountain lake upon an April day, sensitive to the shadow of every passing cloud and rippled afresh by every gust of wind. Perhaps it would be too much to say that his verse has a new metrical lilt for every emotion, but in many passages of the later plays even this is true. The Venetian play "Der

Abenteurer und die Sängerin" shows the adaptation of rhythm to the passing mood of drama. The following passage, for example, is a fragment of pure fantasy, carelessly conceived at first by the speaker, then growing more lyrical as he warms to his subject. Hofmannsthal has conveyed this growth in the metrical form, which is at first casually irregular, breaks at the third line, and rises again in the pentameter to a new imaginative climax. I give below an unmetrical rendering which may make clear the change of mood:—

An den Treppen sollen
Drei Gondeln hängen voller Musikanten
In meinen Farben.
Ich will den Campanile um und um
In Rosen und Narzissen wickeln. Droben
Auf seiner höchsten Spitze sollen Flammen
Von Sandelholz, genährt mit Rosenōl
Den Leib der Nacht mit Riesenarmen fassen.
Ich mach' aus dem Kanal ein fliessend Feuer,
Streu' soviel Blumen aus, dass alle Tauben
Betäubt am Boden flattern, soviel Fackeln
Dass sich die Fische angstvoll in den Grund
Des Meeres bohren.

(At the steps shall ride
Three gondolas, laden with musicians
In my livery.
I will wreathe the Campanile about
With roses and narcissi. Above,
Upon its topmost pinnacle, shall flames
Of sandalwood, fed upon attar of roses
Embrace the body of Night with giant arms.
I will make flowing fire of the canals,
Strew flowers so many that all doves
Shall flutter drunken to the ground,
Scatter so many torches that the fish shall dive in fright
Into the depths of the sea.)

The verse here is more than decorative. The flowing rhymes of "Gestern" (schwere, reiche . . . heisse, weiche) are gone, and a new dramatic rhythm takes their place. Even in "Gestern," however, the method is foreshadowed. The closing scene shows a more clearly dramatic use of the change of metre. The lover parts from the mistress who has deceived him:—

Wir werden ruhig auseinander geh'n
Und ruhig etwa auch uns wiederseh'n.
Und dass du mich betrogen und mein Lieben,
Davon ist kaum ein Schmerz zurückgeblieben. . . .

Doch eines werd' ich niemals dir verzeih'n:
Dass du zerstört den warmen, lichten Schein,
Der fur mich lag auf der entschwundenen Zeit,
Und dass du die dem Ekel hast geweiht!

(*He beckons her to go. She goes out slowly through the door on the right. He gazes after her. His voice quivers, struggling with rising tears.*)

Ick kann so gut verstehen die ungetreuen Frauen. . . .
So gut, mir ist, als könnt' ich in ihre Seelen schauen.
Ich seh' in ihren Augen die Lust, sich aufzugeben,
Im Niegenossenen, Verbotenen zu beben . . . .
Die Lust am Spiel, die Lust, sich selber einzusetzen,
Die Lust am Sieg und Rausch, am Trügen und Verletzen,
Ich seh' ihr Lächeln und—die törichten, die Tränen,
Das rätselhafte Suchen, das ruhelose Sehnen,
Ich fühle, wie sie's drängt zu törichten Entschlüssen,
Wie sie die Augen schliessen und wie sie quälen müssen,

Wie sie ein jedes Gestern fur jedes Heut
begraben,
Und wie sie nicht verstehen, wenn sie
getötet haben.

(*Tears choke his voice. The curtain falls.*)

The change of metre here, after the departure of the beloved, marks the dramatic change from reproach to reflection, from resentment to melancholy. Beside such an inspiration of genius the even roll of the iambic pentameter appears flat and unexpressive. Apart altogether from subject-matter, Hofmannsthal must be credited with having given new life to verse-drama. In " Oedipus und die Sphinx " the method is perfected. The tragedy begins with the ordinary iambic. Musically speaking, this metre is Hofmannsthal's recitative. As the drama develops, the verse breaks into other forms :—

VOICES OF THE STORM.

Die wir tote Könige sind,
Wir thronen im Wind—
Die wir gewaltig waren,
Uns schleift der Sturm an den Haaren,
Und dieser ist unser Sohn.

OEDIPUS.

(*his head bent to the earth, his hands stretched out*)

Erde, du musst nun allein meine Mutter sein.
Die stillen Wolken, die lauten Winde sind meine Geschwister.
Ich hab' alles fortgegeben,
Nur dass ich dein Kind bin, das ist mein Leben.

VOICES OF THE STORM.

Unser Ringen und Raffen
Hat ihn erschaffen.
Herz und Gestalt,
Begierden und Qualen—
Er muss uns bezahlen,
Dass wir mit Gaben
Beladen ihn haben.
Er ist ein König und muss es leiden,
Und war' ein nackter Stein sein Thron:
Er ist unsres Blutes Sohn.

OEDIPUS.

Es redet nicht, es gibt keinen Schein,
Doch irgendwie dringt es in mich hinein,
Dass ich Vater und Mutter und Glanz und Welt
Und alles, was das Herz erhellt
Nicht ganz vergeblich hingegeben habe.
Ich fuhl' es um mich weben: ich werde noch leben.

THE HERALD OF LAIOS.

Böser Sturm, tückisches Dunkel, kaum seh' ich den Weg vor den Füssen !
Musst du, fremdes Land, so hässlich den Herrn mir grüssen ?
Steil die Strasse—da liegt ein Stein, dort sperrt ein Baumstamm den Weg.

So the play runs on, passing from blank verse to rhyme, from rhyme to irregular metre, or again to prose.

Drama cannot live, however, by new forms alone; and I turn now to Hofmannsthal's work as playwright. He has become most widely known through his modernisations of Greek legend in "Elektra" and "Oedipus." The "Elektra" has acquired a certain vogue as the libretto of Strauss's opera, but "Oedipus" is unquestionably the greater play. Both are described as free adaptations of Sophocles. The title-page of "Oedipus und die Sphinx" bears the quotation from Hölderlin: "The surging waves of the heart would never foam into the heights of the soul, were it not that they break upon the ancient, immovable rock of Fate." There is the spirit of

tragedy summed up in a single sentence. The same inscription might have been written upon the plays of Sophocles. Hofmannsthal has followed him ; the only question is whether his newer treatment can be fruitful—whether it can have any meaning for our time.

It must first be admitted that the legends of Elektra and Oedipus, in themselves, are of little consequence. Art made them significant and gave them life. Art gave them form ; in the case of Sophocles, Attic form. It must be repeated that drama can be no more, and no less, than the expression of an individuality through the medium of a craft. The individuality itself inevitably depends upon the period, the morality, the religion, the surroundings. When we say that " Oedipus Rex " is an immortal tragedy, we mean that it is an immortal work of art written by a man individually great, and not that its superstition, its morality, its motive and its setting are immortal. If the work of art is great enough, it will inevitably stereotype and perpetuate the legend or the personages of which it treats in a certain form ; that

is all. The form does not necessarily bear any relation to historical truth or fact; it becomes a tradition. Sophocles created such a tradition for his characters; Hofmannsthal seeks to create another.

But here the difficulty arises. The setting of the Sophoclean tragedies was an Attic setting. Their morality of revenge was an Attic morality. Their Fate was an Attic Fate. The Oracle, the Sphinx, the gods—all of these may be the determinant forces of Attic tragedy, but for us they have no literal meaning. They were stereotyped as ideas by Sophocles as inevitably as the legends in which they played a part were stereotyped. A Viennese poet comes, fresh from rhymings of renaissant Italy, and seeks to galvanise them all into life—adulterous kings, incestuous queens, seers and oracles and bloody myths. They move as sleep-walkers move, in a black mist. They scream of passion; they dance "nameless dances"; but they have no being. Hofmannsthal has attempted the impossible.

I take the "Elektra" first. The verse is perhaps the most beautiful that he has

written. It is worthy of more than recitation by these blood-bespattered ghosts, whose pallor is not hidden by all the coloured veils of metaphor. The "modernisation" of Elektra herself consists chiefly in endowing her with a certain wild-cat animalism. She "crouches like a beast in its lair." She paces upon a fixed course "like a captive creature in a cage." The change from Sophocles to Hofmannsthal is the change from a morality of revenge to a thirst for revenge. With the one, the murder of the guilty mother satisfies the honour of a nation; with the other, it gratifies the sadistic lust of a madwoman. This modern Elektra is pathological to her finger-tips. She belongs to the pages of Krafft-Ebing; never to the Attic landscape. Even the pathology is artificial and "literary" rather than dramatic. Hofmannsthal has never entered into the emotions of his tragedy; he has only painted them in words. He proves himself a great—artificer.

There is no academic question here of the historical form of the legend, nor of

any defence of Sophocles against perversion. The characters must be taken upon their merits. They never live.

"Oedipus und die Sphinx" (1906) is a completer, as well as a more ambitious, work. I have referred already to its originality of form. There is less "modernisation" in the play than in "Elektra," less oppressiveness in its atmosphere; but the figures have the same inevitable unreality. They are no more than pegs upon which is hung the fabric of verse, and they remain as unreal in the hour of triumph as Elektra in the hour of approaching death. Oedipus returns from the mountain cave, where the Sphinx, instead of dragging him down into the depths, has greeted him by name as the deliverer. Jokaste sinks upon his arm "like a broken flower," crying, "Ah, what is it that we do?" and he replies "The blind deed of the gods." The people greet him with shouts of "Hail to the King, the unknown King!" Kreon spreads his cloak upon the ground, and Oedipus and Jokaste pass triumphantly toward the city. There is artifice here again, but

little drama or conviction. It is all "a blind deed of the gods"; and already modern Germany is returning to Sophocles, preferring to study its determinism at first hand.

One other play by Hofmannsthal must be mentioned; the prose drama "Christinas Heimreise" (1910). It is altogether uninspired, and must rank with Hauptmann's "Griselda" as a profoundly disappointing piece which would never have found its way on to any stage but for the reputation of its author. It has no more dramatic power than the early dramatic fragments I have already mentioned; and without verse it lacks their charm. The failure, in Hofmannsthal's case, need not be taken very seriously, for he is still many years younger than Hauptmann, and he has proved himself to be a greater artist. So far his completest work lies in a little volume of collected poems (Gesammelte Gedichte, 1909), which contains the now famous "Ballade des äusseren Lebens" and also "Der Tod des Tizian." His future lies beyond a doubt in the writing of verse-drama. As to the

quality of the verse there can be no fear; there is every hope for the greatness of the drama.

It is not easy to form any definite judgment of a poet-dramatist of thirty-five, not yet at the height of his powers. A contemporary Bavarian critic, Josef Hofmiller, has perhaps summed up Hofmannsthal's present achievement most clearly, and I quote one passage from his essay on the collected poems:—"Hofmannsthal's chief danger lies in virtuosity. He is a philologist in the highest sense, and his peril is the peril of the philologist—that of becoming stiff and mannered through the beauty of his inheritance of language, and of seeking his own tone of expression in the union of other tones, in themselves noble, but together jarring and incongruous. His works are perhaps the most aristocratic of our time. Other literature appears crude and clamorous beside them. Their artistic austerity is such that other literature seems mere babbling, devoid of, style. There are some poems one can no longer read, where one has read his. They have timbre, rhythm, colour, light. . . .

The verbal perfection of his youthful dramas gave rise to the fear that he might be a poetic phenomenon, like the pianist-prodigies; early ripe, early played out; flashing for a time and then forgotten. Time has proved this fear to be groundless. . . . Of all our German authors to-day, he is the most distinctively European."

I cannot leave the subject of Hofmannsthal without quoting the "Ballade des äusseren Lebens" mentioned above:—

Und Kinder wachsen auf mit tiefen Augen,
Die von nichts wissen, wachsen auf und sterben,
Und alle Menschen gehen ihrer Wege.
Und süsse Früchte werden aus den herben
Und fallen nachts wie tote Vögel nieder
Und liegen wenig Tage und verderben.
Und immer weht der Wind, und immer wieder
Vernehmen wir und reden viele Worte
Und spüren Lust und Müdigkeit der Glieder.
Und Strassen laufen durch das Gras, und Orte
Sind da und dort, voll Fackeln, Bäumen, Teichen,
Und drohende, und totenhaft verdorrte. . . .

Wozu sind diese aufgebaut und gleichen
Einander nie? und sind unzählig viele?
Was wechselt Lachen, Weinen und Erbleichen?
Was frommt das alles uns und diese Spiele,
Die wir doch gross und ewig einsam sind
Und wandernd nimmer suchen irgend Ziele?
Was frommt's, dergleichen viel gesehen haben?
Und dennoch sagt der viel, der "Abend" sagt.
Ein Wort, daraus Tiefsinn und Trauer rinnt
Wie schwerer Honig aus den hohlen Waben.

There is immortal tragedy in these lines. Their author remains the chief hope of the modern Theatre.

VIII

RUSSIA

TOLSTOY, GORKY AND TCHEKHOV

Tolstoy and Gorky

One characteristic all Russian playrights possess: a peculiar questioning of life and a criticism of fundamentals. Most of our dramatists are content to accept the fact of life without demur. Accepting it, they proceed to build their drama upon life's institutions; upon marriage and the family, for example, or upon class differences, politics and sociology. Not so the Russians. They set their note of interrogation, for the most part, not against adultery or divorce or oppression, but against life as an existing fact. They question its meaning and seek first its place in their philosophy.

This is a characteristic, of course, not only of Russian drama, but of Russian literature as a whole. In the theatre it is responsible for the appearance of incompleteness and incoherence which marks most of the plays. There is little technical accomplishment in Russian drama. But at the same time it exhibits the author's individuality most clearly, for the playright who goes to the roots of life must himself emerge with a philosophy, even if it be one of pessimism.

Tolstoy and Gorky may be taken together by way of illustration. Here we have one subject visualised by two different temperaments. The subject is the Russian lower class. Tolstoy holds a brief for the peasantry; his types, therefore, are peasant types. Gorky is a proletarian of the cities, and he finds drama in the night shelter, the cheap lodging-house, and the streets. Both endeavour to express an attitude toward life through their characters.

Of all the naturalists, Tolstoy conforms most nearly to the naturalistic ideal in his plays. There can be no doubt that this

ideal was connected in the minds of its earlier followers with the decivilisation of art. The revolt against pseudo-romanticism drove them to represent the actual, and the revolt against upper-class drama led them to seek inspiration among the common people. Zola headed the movement as far as Western Europe was concerned, but Zola's types, although proletarians for the most part, belonged to a civilisation. They were decivilised in their speech and action rather than in their setting. Tolstoy was able, as a Russian, to carry the naturalistic conception to its logical extreme. In his "Power of Darkness," first produced by the Parisian Thêâtre Libre early in 1888, he portrayed what was to all intents and purposes a state of barbarism; a group of peasants, remote and primitive, unfamiliar to the rest of Europe, and yet monotonous; the whole picture relieved only by a certain crude individual power. "The Power of Darkness" has often been quoted as the masterpiece of naturalism. That it may be; but it is not a masterpiece of drama. It has a certain grand

barbaric simplicity, and that is all. With Tolstoy's other play, "The Fruits of Culture," it was submerged by the coming of Ibsen, who gave to realism the note of distinction and differentiation which the drama of the Russian peasantry could never provide. It need hardly be said that the author of "Anna Karenina" proves himself to be a great creator of individual types in both of these plays, but what Europe awaited from drama at the time of the Théâtre Libre was not merely character-drawing, but direction. Ibsen showed the way, and Tolstoy was left far behind. With the passing of each year "The Power of Darkness" and "The Fruits of Culture" seem more remote; and this impression is the stronger when Tolstoy's own change of philosophy in his later years is taken into account. As far as Tolstoy the artist is concerned, the change no doubt represents a natural development rather than a conversion. He always believed in his peasantry, even though their simplicity of life should spell preference for squalor; their simplicity of thought, ingrained

stupidity; their passions, primitive savagery and crimes of violence; their daily round, monotony relieved by superstition. He believed in their potentiality as a world-force, and in the end he offered them a peasant gospel. His preoccupation with them was always at bottom ethical; in other words, he cared more for them as a mass of humanity than as a group of possibly unsocial, anarchical individuals. Unfortunately, as one writer has remarked, "it is easier to found an impossible religion than to write an 'Anna Karenina.'" And drama comes from the individual, not from the mass.

Maxim Gorky's work took, as has already been pointed out, the different direction of a different temperament. Gorky's plea for the outcasts has little in common with Tolstoy's religious belief in the destiny of the peasantry. His most successful play, "A Night Shelter" (performed in England by the Stage Society in 1903, under the title of "The Lower Depths") is a work of great power. The power is personal rather than dramatic; it is the most vivid expression of Gorky,

and the play is Russian through and through. I have seen it performed only in Zurich, before an audience mainly composed of Russian students. It consists simply of four "scenes from the depths," loosely knit together, casual and incoherent. The curtain rises upon the night shelter. To the right lies a dying woman, moaning at intervals; near her is a man dressed only in a shirt, preparing slowly and deliberately to retire for the night. Pulpit-like partitions, odd scraps of furniture and bedsteads stake out the claim of each sleeper along the wall. Around and above the stove other figures are huddled; a thief, a degenerate aristocrat, a prostitute, an actor who has come down in the world and an inebriate who insists upon repeating the doctor's verdict upon him: "Your system is poisoned through and through with alcohol" (Ihr Organismus ist mit Alkohol durch und durch vergiftet). But each tells his own story, warming himself as it were at the fire of the past, and ignoring the others in a dream-monologue of egoism. Everyone wants to talk; no one to listen. The

actor declaims his old parts, the aristocrat describes how the world has passed him by, a beggar plays popular tunes upon a harmonium—and in the midst of it all the woman dies. The drama, then, is the drama of moments.

The next figure to appear is the old white-bearded Luka, named by the others the "little father." Luka preaches a gospel of cheerfulness. "One must respect everybody," he says. There is a dignity in life, even here in the night shelter. One must never judge by appearances. For the despairing he has a jolly "Keep your pecker up," and for the aggressive a gentle, self-depreciatory disarmament. Luka is something of a raisonneur. He believes in the magical power of faith, no matter whether the faith be true or no. A pragmatist philosopher, then, accepting the Tolstoyan gospel of love and rejection of violence purely as a working hypothesis. But Luka helps nobody. The woman is already dead, the thief is arrested, the actor hangs himself, and all goes on as before. Then one Satin begins to preach

another gospel. He sees life to-day, life in the night shelter, only as the soil from which the man of the future will grow. We are all no more than the servants of this future lord. With this touch of Nietzschean morality in the last act the play closes. All that emerges is: "Here are men living like beasts. But they are men and brothers, and they have their personal dignity and their philosophy." There speaks Gorky.

This "Night Shelter" is strangely impressive. Even a single performance of it can never be forgotten. Its gloom never grows monotonous, and its spirit saves it from being merely an aftermath of the old naturalistic period. It dates from 1902. Since then Gorky has written many plays—among them "Children of the Sun," "Barbarians," and "The Last"—but none of them have realised the hopes for his future to which "A Night Shelter" gave rise. Gorky, like Hauptmann, seems to have made the mistake of writing his masterpiece at the beginning of his career. He was never an accomplished craftsman. Most of his stage

devices, even in "A Night Shelter," are borrowed and conventional. These weaknesses would not have mattered greatly, however, if only he had continued as he began, with some attempt to free the drama of the depths from sterile naturalism and from the mere representation of the actual in kinematographic pictures. Instead, he has gone back to monotony and passed out of touch with Western Europe. "A Night Shelter" remains a dramatic phenomenon, like Björnson's "Beyond Human Power" and Wedekind's "Frühlings Erwachen," and Gorky's later plays, for all their apparent modernity, belong to a dead age. It matters nothing that twenty years ago this age was alive and strenuous; for us it can no longer have any meaning. The masterpieces of naturalism, such as they were, have long since been written. They were the masterpieces of revolt—correctives of a certain definite condition in the theatre, remedies for a certain definite disease of unreality. As far as the modern theatre is concerned, the condition has been changed and the disease cured. Europe awaits a new

synthesis in drama, and the many playwrights who refuse to recognise the change and persist in repeating the old realistic creed must be classed with Dumas and Sardou as props of an out-worn tradition.

Anton Tchekhov

Tchekhov's plays are the most interesting that modern Russia has as yet produced. A certain questioning of life is all that they have in common with the work of Tolstoy and Gorky. Tolstoy sought the meaning of life among the peasantry, Gorky among the city slums and the lower bourgeois class, Tchekhov among "the intelligence." Russian society is divided into two classes: "the intelligence" and the rest. That "intelligence" includes the entire educated community, and it represents as a whole the most advanced civilised nation in Europe. It is largely freethinking and revolutionary, and its capacity for making political revolutions is limited, firstly, by military and police rule and, secondly, by the inertia of the mass of the people. It is perhaps em-

bittered by national failure, but still full of life. Tolstoy and Gorky set to work, with their different views and temperaments, upon the dramatisation of the inertia; Tchekhov chose to deal with the driving force of modernity, politically impotent for the present, but individually all-powerful. That is why his plays must always be the more interesting. His types belong to an aristocracy of thought, and, further (since intellect alone can be of little service to the dramatist), to an aristocracy of feeling. They possess the capacity for great drama because they are at once highly sensitive and highly differentiated among themselves. The capacity for great drama, be it noted; not necessarily its achievement. A play or a novel crammed with "intellectuals"—poets, playwrights, novelists, teachers, journalists, actors, and Bohemians—is not necessarily a great play or a great novel on that account. The class or profession of the characters matters nothing; their potentiality as individuals is all-important. If the same degree of sensitiveness and differentiation can be created

among other types, the same material for great drama will result. The achievement depends upon the author, his temperament and his skill as a craftsman. Personality remains the magical word which opens the dull mountain of the actual and shows us the real.

It must be said at once that Tchekhov can by no stretch of imagination be called a great dramatist. He cried "Open Sesame!" to actuality, but the reality behind was only vaguely outlined, and he died before he could perfect the new dramatic form which he attempted to create. His plays are a series of original experiments rather than a finished whole. I propose to deal here mainly with the two four-act dramas "The Seagull" and "The Three Sisters." "The Seagull," it may be noted, was given recently by the Scottish Repertory Theatre in Glasgow. This play is full of the atmosphere of the Russian "intelligence." It depends altogether upon elusive moods, and only by entering very fully into these moods can the spectator find its tragedy even remotely credible. The weakness of

Tchekhov's strikingly original technique is that his characterisation depends so much more upon what the characters say than upon what they do. They seem at first sight the most irrelevant people that any dramatist could devise. They stroll casually upon the stage, talking about the weather, their supper, their ailments, their preferences, their views, their philosophy; and from this fluid mass of conversation there crystallises very gradually the conception of each individual as a separate entity. The conversation is always extraordinarily good, and so the individual conception which emerges, without having the rigidity of the theatrical "type," is always clearly defined.

Tchekhov retains the form of the four-act play, dealing throughout with the same group of persons. He is concerned with ideas only as the means of drama, and what he lacks is sense of the theatre rather than dramatic sense. As to the ideas themselves, he has clearly used the young poet Constantine in "The Seagull" as his mouthpiece.

Constantine is the son of an actress, one

Irene Treplewa. Irene has a liaison with Doris Trigorin, a novelist-playwright. These three, with Irene's brother Sorin, and a young girl named Nina, are the chief characters of "The Seagull." Constantine and Nina are lovers. The play passes at Sorin's country house, where Constantine has set up an open-air theatre, with a rough stage, a curtain and a background of lake and sky. He has devised it for the performance of a symbolist play of his own, with Nina as actress, and his mother and the remaining guests have been invited as spectators.[1] Early in the first act Constantine explains his purpose to Sorin :—

> CONSTANTINE : . . . To me the Theatre of to-day is no more than an antiquated prejudice, a dull routine. When the curtain rises, and all these accomplished actors, these priests of a sacred art, endeavour to show, by lamplight, in a room with three

[1] These passages have been rendered from the German, and they are intended only to illustrate the trend of the play. The translator of "The Seagull" for the Scottish Repertory Theatre is Mr. George Calderon.

walls, how ordinary people eat, drink, love, move about the world; when a morality is preached to us in trivial phrases and pictures—a wretched, commonplace morality convenient for household use; when the same old story is dished up again and again in a thousand variations; then I can do no otherwise than fly as Maupassant fled from the Eiffel Tower, whose triviality threatened to shatter his soul!

SORIN: But you must admit that the Theatre is an important factor in civilisation. . . .

CONSTANTINE: New forms are what we need, new forms. Better have nothing at all than cling to the old tradition.

The new form is presently forthcoming. The guests arrive, and when they are seated the curtain rises, disclosing Nina seated upon a stone:—

NINA: Men and lions, eagles and partridges, antler-crowned stags, geese and spiders, silent inhabitants of the waters, starfish and all creatures invisible to the eye—in a word, all living beings have completed their dismal course and are extinguished. For many thousands of years no living creature more has found refuge upon the earth, and the poor moon

above lights her candle to no purpose. No longer do the cranes awaken upon the meadow with their merry song, and among the forest limes no cockchafer is heard. It's cold, cold, cold! It's empty, empty, empty! I'm afraid, afraid, afraid! The bodies of the living have fallen into dust, and the eternal Cause has changed them into stones, into water, into clouds. But their souls have been merged into a single soul. That world-soul am I! In me live the spirits of Alexander, of Cæsar, of Napoleon, of Shakespeare, together with the soul of the meanest worm. The reason of mankind and the instinct of the beasts are blended in me. I know all, all, all, and every life that is in me I live through afresh.

[*Will-o'-the wisps hover about her.*]

IRENE: That smacks of decadence!

CONSTANTINE *(reproachfully)*: Mother!

NINA: I am lonely. Once in every hundred years I open my lips to speak. My voice sounds chilly in the emptiness; no one hears me. Even the will-o'-the-wisps are deaf. Each evening they are born of the foul quagmire, and they flicker till the dawn without thought, without will, without life. From fear lest I should awaken life within them, the father of

eternal chaos, Satan, completes each instant a change of their particles, as in the water and the stones; they change unceasingly. In the whole universe my soul alone remains constant and unalterable. Like a prisoner thrown into the depths of a well, I know not where I am nor what awaits me. One thing alone has been revealed to me—that in the grim wrestle with Satan, author of material powers, the victory will be mine; and that then soul and matter will be blended in noble harmony and the kingdom of the world-purpose will begin. But that can only be when, after a long, long roll of centuries the moon, bright Sirius and the earth have crumbled into dust. Until then horror, horror ——

[*In the distance two red points of light are seen.*]

NINA: Satan, my enemy, approaches. I see his hideous eyes of fire ——

IRENE: There's a smell of sulphur. Does that belong to the piece?

CONSTANTINE: Yes.

IRENE *(laughing)*: An original effect!

CONSTANTINE: Mother.

[*Dorn takes off his hat.*]

NINA: Since there are no longer any men——

PAULINE *(to Dorn)*: Put on your hat. You'll catch cold.

IRENE: The doctor took off his hat to Satan, author of material powers.

CONSTANTINE (*raging*): The play is over! Down with the curtain!

IRENE: Why lose your temper!

CONSTANTINE: Enough! Down with the curtain! (*Stamping his foot.*) Let it fall, I say!

[*The curtain falls.*]

CONSTANTINE: I ask your pardon. I had forgotten that only some few chosen pieces may be written and performed. I presumed too much. I—I—

[*He goes off to the left.*]

Constantine, always hypersensitive, becomes embittered by this failure. With his play he loses Nina. For Nina, it seems, has the soul of the player. She despises failures and worships success. Trigorin, "the famous author, whose name is in all the papers, whose portrait is sold in every picture-shop, whose books are read throughout the world," becomes her hero. Constantine lays a dead seagull at her feet, and threatens suicide, but Nina is unmoved. The pose of symbolism is lost upon her, but she is fascinated by

the pose of paradox and *ennui* which Trigorin effects :—

[*Trigorin enters, writing in his notebook.*]

NINA : Good morning, Monsieur Trigorin.

TRIGORIN : Ah, good morning ! Things have taken an unexpected turn. We shall probably leave to-day. I may not see you again. A pity ! I seldom meet young and interesting ladies. That is why the girls in my novels are for the most part so falsely drawn. I wish I could change places with you, if only for an hour, just to find out how you think and what you are.

NINA : Ah, *I* would change places willingly, Monsieur Trigorin !

TRIGORIN : Why ?

NINA : Just to learn what a famous author feels and thinks. How happy you must be !

TRIGORIN (*shrugging his shoulders*) : I ? H'm—very kind of you ! You speak of happiness and fame. For me these are pretty words—forgive the comparison—as pretty as marmalade, a confection that I never eat. You are very young—and very naïve. (*Taking out his watch*) I must get back to work. Time presses. You have touched my sore point—but let that pass. Look at my charming and delightful life a little more closely. Day and night one

thought pursues me: I must write, write, write. Barely is one novel finished, when I am driven to begin a second, then a third, a fourth—post-haste, whether I will or no. Where is the charm and the delight, if I may ask? It's a mad helter-skelter chase. Here I am chatting with you, but not for a single instant does the thought leave me that upon my writing-table there lies an unfinished manuscript. (*He points skyward.*) Do you see the cloud there, shaped like a piano? Immediately I think, "At the first opportunity this piano-like cloud must be mentioned." Or there is a scent of heliotrope. It occurs to me, "This delicate scent suits the mood of a summer evening." Every word, every sentence I hear or utter excites my literary sense, and all these words and sentences are stored in my workshop until opportunity comes to use them. And when the day's work is over, and I take my seat in the theatre or go fishing, —do you imagine that I find relaxation? Never! In my brain I feel the work continue—it rolls about like some heavy iron bullet—new material! I long for the hour when I can sit down once more at my table and write. So it goes on, year in, year out; I have no rest from myself. At the beginning of my career I was constantly

troubled by other cares. A morbid struggle for recognition; after praise, doubt of its sincerity. I trembled before my public, and each time that I produced a new play it seemed to me that the brunettes were hostile and the blondes indifferent. I was tortured beyond description.

NINA: Yes, but the inspiration, the act of creation in itself—does that not make you happy?

TRIGORIN: As long as I am writing, I am satisfied. Even proof-correcting gives me pleasure; but the moment my work is published it is loathsome to me. I have one feeling only: it was not what I meant to write; it was a mistake which should never have been published at all. I wrangle with myself. (*He laughs.*) But the public reads it. "H'm. Yes." And says to itself, "Neat enough, clever enough. But he's not a Tolstoy." Or: "Excellent, but not to be compared with Turgenev's 'Father and Sons.'" So it will be to the end of my life; all neat and pretty enough, but nothing more. And when I am dead, and my friends pass by my grave, they will say: "Here lies Trigorin. He was a good writer, but Tolstoy was better."

Nina listens eagerly to this persiflage. She longs for the life of the city, of the

artist, of the theatre. Presently the note-book comes into play again. Trigorin observes the dead seagull—"a fine bird," as he remarks. It provides him with material for a short story :—

> "By the shore of a lake lives a young girl. . . . She loves the water as passionately as a seagull, and is herself as free and happy. By chance a man passes by one day. He sees her, and in the boredom of an idle hour he ruins her, just as a huntsman shoots a bird."

The fable proves true, and Nina becomes Trigorin's mistress. Meanwhile Constantine attempts suicide, and appears in the third act with a bandaged head, morose as ever, but otherwise little the worse. The guests leave for Moscow, and Nina goes to the same city to seek an engagement in the theatre.

The fourth act passes two years later, in a tragic atmosphere of reminiscence and disillusionment for all the characters. Constantine is still living upon his uncle's estate. His books and poems, published under a pseudonym, have brought him recognition, but no peace of mind. The

theatre by the lake stands empty, its curtain flapping in the wind. Trigorin, as usual, is just finishing a new book. Irene is still playing Magda and the Lady of the Camelias. Sorin still laments the ineffectuality of his existence. Life, art, love—they all move in the old rut. Nina's history is told. She had a child. The child died, and Trigorin left her. She failed at first as an actress, and moved steadily downward in her profession. But for her, the family party in Sorin's house is as complete as in the first act. Irene, Trigorin, Dorn and Sorin settle down to a game of cards before supper. Sorin falls asleep and spoils the game. Constantine is left alone :—

> CONSTANTINE (*turns over the leaves of the manuscript upon his writing-table, and takes up a half-finished sheet*): I have spoken so much of new forms, and now I see that there is no escape from the tyranny of routine. (*He reads.*) "Upon the table was a radiant bouquet of flowers . . . her pale face, framed in dark tresses" . . . Radiant, framed—those are trivial! (*He crosses them out.*) I leave them to Trigorin; he has a pattern ready-made.

Then Nina comes. She, too, is in the grip of routine :—

> NINA: So you are an author, now. You have become a poet, I an actress. The whirlpool has caught us both. How gaily I used to live, as a child! When I awoke in the morning life sang and danced within me. I loved you then! I dreamed of fame and happiness. And now! To-morrow I must set out for my winter engagement in Ufa, cooped up in a third-class carriage with dirty peasants. In Ufa the *nouveaux riches* will pester me with their clumsy love-making. Oh, life is so vulgar!

She must go back to the theatre, however, for nothing but work can satisfy her :—

> NINA: Good-bye. When I am a great artist, you must come and see me play. Promise! And now——(*she takes his hand*). It's late. I'm so tired that I can hardly stand.
>
> [*Constantine prepares to accompany her.*]
>
> NINA: No, no. Don't come. I can find the way alone. . . . If you see Trigorin, say nothing. I love him. I love him more than ever—material for a short

story, ha, ha, ha! Oh, Constantine, how splendid it was in the old days—you remember—my first appearance in the theatre on the shore. (*She declaims*): "Men and lions, eagles and partridges, antler-crowned stags, silent inhabitants of the waters, starfish and all creatures invisible to the eye—in a word, all living beings have completed their dismal course and are extinguished. . . ."

[*She embraces him and hurries out. Constantine, alone, gathers all the manuscripts upon the writing-table, tears them up, throws the fragments into the fire, and leaves the room.*]

Irene, Trigorin, Dorn and the others return. In the midst of their conversation they are startled by a shot:—

IRENE: What was that?

DORN: Oh, nothing. Some chemicals must have exploded in my medicine-chest. Don't trouble to move. (*He goes into the room on the right, returning immediately.*) Just as I thought. A bottle of ether has burst. You would hardly believe what power a couple of grammes of the stuff can generate.

IRENE: (*seating herself at the card-table*): What a start it gave me. It reminded me of the time when . . .

> DORN (*turning over the leaves of a magazine*): My dear Monsieur Trigorin! May I trouble you for one moment? Two months ago I read an article here—some correspondence from America, and I wanted to ask you . . . (*He takes Trigorin by the arm and leads him down stage*). The question interests me greatly. (*In a low tone*) Make some pretext to get your friends away. Constantine has just shot himself in the next room.

There the play ends. Constantine leaves the world to its charlatanism and routine. His death will hardly cost Trigorin a sleepless night, and may even provide useful material for a new novel. Irene will doubtless mourn for a time, but black probably suits her; and in any case she will shortly return to the theatre to interpret Dumas and Sudermann with renewed emotional power. Dorn will grieve sincerely, but then Dorn is only a poor country doctor. Literary Russia will not be greatly troubled by the loss of its youngest poet. A poet more or less; what does it matter? The routine continues.

I turn now to "The Three Sisters," another tragedy of disillusionment.

It passes in a provincial town. The three sisters are Olga, Mascha and Irene. Olga, the eldest, is an unmarried school teacher. Mascha is the wife of a lecturer in the gymnasium. Irene is a telegraph operator in the post office. All three were brought up in Moscow, and their ideal of life is a return to the city. Their father, a brigadier-general, died early and left them with the alternative of marrying or earning their own living. Mascha married at eighteen, and found her husband a bore. Olga and Irene are equally dissatisfied with their work. They have a brother named Andrei Prosorow, a scholar who hopes for a professorship in the Moscow University. Moscow, indeed, appears to all of them the distant paradise. Throughout four acts they talk of it, but in the end they all remain where they are. Andrei marries unwisely and falls into a groove as secretary to the local town council. Olga continues at her school. Mascha falls in love with a married lieutenant whose regiment is transferred elsewhere.

Irene seeks a way of escape by betrothing herself to another officer, who is killed in a senseless duel. The removal of the regiment deprives the family even of their acquaintances. Andrei sums up the situation in the last act:—

ANDREI: We have hardly begun to live, when we grow tedious, dull, lazy, useless, wretched and indifferent. This town of ours has existed for two hundred years. It has a hundred thousand inhabitants, and there is not one among them unlike all the rest. It has not given birth to a single hero in the whole course of its history; it has produced no thinker, no artist, no personality of the smallest importance, no one who could arouse a burning desire to emulate him. The people here do no more than eat, drink, sleep and die. Others are born, who eat, drink and sleep in their turn; and, lest boredom should destroy them altogether, they seek variety in gossip, brandy, cards, intrigue. . . . Wives are unfaithful to their husbands, and the husbands lie and pretend that they have seen nothing. The vulgar tradition descends upon the children, clouding their minds until the spark of divinity within them is extinguished, and they grow up to be just

such pitiable, trivial, commonplace corpses as their fathers and mothers were before them. Shame upon such a life!

If this play were unrelieved, it would be intolerable. It is relieved by its note of revolt, by its distinction of dialogue, and by its plea (more insistent even than in "The Seagull") that comfort and civilisation alone can give no dignity to existence. To the cry of "Life is vulgar, therefore art is debased," Tchekhov replies with "Art is debased, therefore life is vulgar." His demand is for a standard of living rather than for a standard of life. Individuality, with him, comes first.

And so with all his plays. It is as if the author said: "We live in a civilisation accessible only to the few. Here are the few. I show them to you for an hour, with their culture, their books, their plays, their theatres within the theatre, their learning and their wit. Their existence represents the last word in modernity. They are dissatisfied, unhappy, often dulled and broken. What is the meaning of it all? What is modernity? An episode. The motive of life? A mystery

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to which every individual has potentially the key. I give you the picture-puzzle of existence in fragments. Seat yourself here in the prison cell, and piece them together as you please. I write only for those who want to understand. Life and art—those two must be placed side by side. Yes, go on. You have discovered a part of the secret. You are building, creating. More fragments here and there—the scheme grows clearer. Now hold it up to the light . . . See, you have made a window of stained glass."

That is the drama of Tchekhov.

IX

FRANCE

CAPUS AND BRIEUX

The tradition of centuries has made France the home of the theatre. There is in the very word "théâtre" and in the phrase "théâtre français" a subtle lisp of nativity beside which the solid hearts-of-oak ring of "The British Theatre," or the Teutonic growl of "Das deutsche Drama," appear bastard and incongruous; a delicate atmosphere of artifice, a suggestion of rouge and powder, and, above all, of lightness and finesse. The nineteenth century confirmed the tradition. Dumas and Sardou were purveyors of drama, not only to France, but to the whole world. In plays, as in bonnets, Paris set the fashion.

It was fitting, therefore, that M. Antoine's Théâtre Libre should be the first among the "free theatres" of the 1890

period. Parisian supremacy in drama was challenged by Ibsen and Tolstoy. Uncouth figures like Strindberg invaded the capital—an invasion as alarming to the well-bred dramatic critic and theatre-goer as that of 1870 to the peaceful *bourgeoisie*. "Naturalism" was the new cry, and a rude wind from the north swept the soliloquy and the aside into the playwright's waste-paper basket. The word "sociale" was heard. It appeared that the salvation of drama lay in becoming "sociale"; and no doubt the epithet sounded almost as ominous as "socialiste." At all events, the newer playwrights appeared to ignore the existence of good society, and persisted in introducing a number of excessively vulgar characters upon the stage. The best that conservative criticism could say of them was that they were undeniably convincing.

So much for the conservative attitude. To the artistic revolutionaries the establishment of the Théâtre Libre was a venture of the highest hope. What could be more appropriate than that it should restore the

supremacy of France by the discovery of a new dramatist of genius able to meet the Northmen upon their own ground; perhaps to surpass them and to infuse the drama of Europe with new life? The plays of Ibsen, Tolstoy and Strindberg offered immediate stimulus, but M. Antoine's aim was, of course, to found a stage for a new French dramatic school. There was more substantial hope for such a school in Paris than in the poineer theatres of Berlin and London, for one modern playwright, Henri Becque, was already well known, and had attracted a certain number of disciples. His "Les Corbeaux" was given at the Comédie Française in 1882, and "La Parisienne" at the Théâtre de la Renaissance in 1885; someyears, therefore, before the appearance of M. Antoine's venture.

The "discoveries" of the Théâtre Libre were Georges Courteline ("Boubouroche,") Emile Fabre ("L'Argent"), Georges Ancey ("La Dupe"), François de Curel ("Les Fossiles" and "L'Envers d'une Sainte"), and Brieux ("Blanchette"). These authors, with Henri Becque, repre-

sent practically all the work of any value in modern French drama. Their number is very small, and the little group becomes almost insignificant when we eliminate Courteline and Ancey, who practised only the passing vogue of the *comédie rosse*, or brutal comedy. This phenomenon of the *comédie rosse* seems to have represented the first effect of naturalism upon the disingenuous, cultivated mind of the Parisian playwright. Naturalism, as seen in Tolstoy's peasant dramas or in Strindberg's "The Father," was associated with the decivilisation of art. The Parisians of the new school, unfamiliar with peasantries or wild Norsemen, proceeded to decivilise the civilised; hence the brutal comedy, a form clever enough, but so mannered in its effort to keep up with the times that it is really no more convincing than the old theatrical hotch-potch of Sardou. The vogue soon passed, and neither Ancey nor Courteline remained in the front rank of French dramatists.

Meanwhile there was a revolt of the symbolists and romantics. In 1893 M. Lugné Poë founded the Théâtre de

l'Œuvre as a rival establishment to the Théâtre Libre, and produced there the plays of Maeterlinck. Shortly afterwards Rostand appeared with "Les Romanesques" and "La Princesse Lointaine." The choice lay, then, between the realistic Théâtre Libre on the one hand, and new symbolism and old romance on the other. Maeterlinck was in accord with the spirit of his age. The one quality which all branches of the newer dramatic movement possessed in common was their concern, first and foremost, with the *Lebenskampf;* the battle of existence. The setting of the battlefield varied with the temperament of the playwright.

With Tolstoy it was the life of the Russian peasantry; with Strindberg the cosmos of a northern civilisation in process of birth; with Maeterlinck, an excursion out of place and time into castles and dim forests where, remote from life's institutions, the issue lay between soul and soul; with Ibsen, a compound of symbolism and realism infused into the life of the Norwegian *bourgeoisie;* with the protagonists of the *comédie rosse*,

Parisian culture tinged with barbarism; with Brieux, social drama founded upon the abuses of social life. The *Lebenskampf* was always uppermost, and in the battle Rostand took no part. He was content to make sweet music, and to embody much old humanity in the old romance. As a dramatist he was an isolated phenomenon, sailing his paper craft in a backwater, unconcerned with the main stream of his age; and he has nothing to do with the modern theatre.

If the dramatists of the Théâtre Libre were eclipsed by the symbolists, this was due not to any real opposition between realism and symbolism, but purely to their own deficiencies. M. Antoine's theatre failed to discover a single French dramatist comparable with the Scandinavians whose plays it originally produced. Brieux's trumped-up social dramas have been vastly overrated. In any case, experience proved that they could readily find a popular audience elsewhere, and Brieux himself became an Academician. Émile Fabre produced no plays of distinction, and François de Curel soon ceased

to write for the stage. Apart from the abolition of soliloquies and "asides," none of the authors of the Théâtre Libre went beyond Henri Becque.

In order that the bankruptcy of modern French drama may be fully understood, it is only necessary to glance at the authors who hold the stage of present-day Paris. Beside Brieux and Rostand, we find Paul Hervieu ("La Dédale," "Les Ténailles," "Connais-toi," "La Course de Flambeau"), Henri Bernstein ("La Griffe," "Samson," "Le Voleur," "La Rafale"), Alfred Capus ("Notre Jeunesse," "Qui perd, qui gagne," "Monsieur Pigéois," "Brignol et sa Fille"), Maurice Donnay ("Amants," "La Douloureuse," "La Bascule"), Georges Porto-Riche ("Le Passé," "Amoureuse"), Paul Bourget ("La Barricade"), Henri Bataille ("Ton Sang," "Un Scandale," "La Femme Nue," "La Vierge Folle"), Pierre Wolff ("Le Ruisseau," "L'Age d'Aimer"), Tristan Bernard, Henri Lavedan ("Le Nouveau Jeu," "Le Duel," "Viveur"), De Flers and Caillavet ("L'Amour Vieille"), Jules Lemaître ("L'Ainée," "Le Pardon"), and Octave

Mirbeau ("Les Mauvais Bergers," "Les Affaires sont les Affaires"). It may be added that within recent years this group of authors has given us such English translations and adaptations as "Dame Nature," "The Crisis," "The Thief," "A Bolt from the Blue," "Inconstant George," "The Whirlwind," "Glass Houses," "Business is Business," and "Samson," most of which are altogether worthless, and were apparently produced only because the supply of similar rubbish written by our own West End dramatists was not equal to the demand.

Some exceptions must, of course, be made. M. Octave Mirbeau's "Les Affaires sont les Affaires," both in the original and in the English adaptation, is an extremely able piece of work. MM. De Flers and Caillavet have a gift for light and witty dialogue. M. Capus and M. Maurice Donnay preserve a higher level than that of the average boulevardian purveyor of drama. It will suffice here to deal with Capus and Brieux as representatives of a country rich in "interesting" playwrights, but without a dramatist of genius.

Alfred Capus.

The first impression which the art of Capus gives is one of weary superficiality. Later, one perceives that the superficiality goes into the depths of his temperament; that it is the deliberate expression of a personal conviction. The weariness remains; but his characters cease to be merely puppets manipulated upon the surface of life for the sake of effect, and become the emblems of a philosophy. Capus seeks truth, and he finds a civilisation of lies. An enervated, decadent civilisation, moreover, peopled with tired metropolitans. He does not attack it. Violence is not in his line: Instead, he smiles with ironical good nature, and sits down to portray it to the life. His plays are the last word in sophistication. They are the work of an agreeable weakling. They symbolise the Gallic hands outstretched in a deprecatory gesture, the Gallic eyebrows raised. In the grim wrestle of the Lebenskampf, the battle of existence, Capus has no part. Why should one perspire in the effort to attain the

unattainable? That may be left to the Germans. Capus provides a little curtained side-show of his own; an exhibition of graceful sword-play worthy of the traditions of his country. The rapiers are buttoned. If by chance a button should slip, and one of the combatants be wounded, he smiles again with a shrug of the shoulders, as who should say "A pity, but it cannot be helped. These little accidents will happen occasionally. Kindly keep your seats. I detest scenes."

He ignores politics, class differences and sociology, except as subjects for good-humoured ridicule. He is never "sociale." Why should he be? His types belong to a society where all institutions are in the melting-pot, all moralities exploded, all religions ignored. They are amiable egoists. At the end of an age of notes of interrogation, they have come to a full stop. Henceforth they will do as they please. They look about them, and discover nothing but a chaos of fatalism, broken idols, discredited codes of honour, new hypocrisies for old. They are bored. They stretch themselves and yawn. Life

remains, but where is drama to be found? They look a little more closely. Sex still exists. A dangerous theme, this, to be treated politely and dispassionately; for no other treatment can be adapted to the drama of the fencing-match. Perhaps, after all, the aphorists of the past three centuries have not said the last word upon the subject of woman? A phrase is added here and there; a latter-day epigram of this latter-day ph-philosopher (the word comes stammeringly). Then the most piquant find of all; the re-discovery of the old views of life, the worn-out moralities, the long-since abandoned faiths. Here is the field where Capus is most subtly effective. If vice bores you, he suggests, try virtue. You will find it quite fresh and charming, like an ice after too much wine at dinner. If mistresses bore you, there is nothing simpler than marriage and respectability. If you have had enough of free thought, try a dose of religion. If you are tired of lying, why not begin telling the truth? It will be a new sensation, and new sensations are always worth a slight effort. Not a great effort, of course; nothing in

the world is worth that. But just the exertion of will, say, that is necessary in order to rise at ten o'clock of a summer morning; the effort needed to turn over a leaf of a book that lies well within your reach.

Not that Capus definitely urges this or any other rule of life. He never preaches; he is much too politely tolerant. (Or too tired?) But his characters make such experiments—and there lies his comedy. His is an inexhaustible well of shallowness. He has emptiness enough to blow a thousand brilliant bubbles. Or again, strength enough to pull the trigger of a popgun. He regards life with the heavy eyes of a sophisticated child allowed to sit up too late. If they ever open wide, it is with a twinkle of mischief at the great joke of universal insincerity. There is no fear that France will put him to bed; his comments on the passing show are so amusing. He will no doubt continue to entertain the boulevards (and Mr. Walkley) for many years to come. Prince of the later Latins, builder of toy castles, master of the ceremonies at a lazy dance of the disillusioned.

And yet, a seeker after truth in a world of shams. He has the will to power, and the temperament of inertia.

Observe, in a dramatist-phenomenon such as this, the natural offspring of an unnatural age. Science, joined perforce to the Chaotic State of rich and poor, civilised and decivilised, free men and slaves, brings forth from time to time such bastard children. The nineteenth century compelled the union. Truth was wedded to a compromise. The old faiths and the old moralities crumbled, but their pretence remained. Property and marriage continued to do service for the children of the apes. Hence the Chaotic State made more chaotic; the pinnacled civilisation of the few sustained by a conspiracy.

Capus and his like are the result. He is entertained by the spectacle, and yet himself an entertainer. Truth, for him, no longer bears a flaming sword, but goes in motley with cap and bells to provide a new amusement for bored liars. Capus enters into the joke delightedly. Impotent before the drama of the passions or the realities of social war, he has within

him the spirit of the eternal jester-ape. In the primeval forest he would be the first to mock at one of our mystical forbears who turned his face to the sun and worshipped; the first to tie a knot in the tails of a pair of monkey-lovers who had found Romance. In a word, the first sceptic. He still mocks at the worshipper; he still ties the playful knot. This age, above all others, is suited to his humour. There is so much false obeisance; there are so many ill-assorted tails. The jester-ape fulfils his mission, and the boulevardians laugh.

I find that I have not discussed any of M. Capus' plays. It is unnecessary.

Brieux

One Sunday afternoon some years ago I found my way to a little theatre on the eastern boulevards of Brussels. The audience was sparse but tearful; the "melting mood," rightly extolled by Mr. Shaw, taking the unattractive form of a frequent and universal use of the pocket-handkerchief. The play given was

"Blanchette," by M. Brieux, member of the French Academy. I did not know then that "Blanchette" was one of the first successes of M. Antoine's Théâtre Libre, nor that M. Brieux had already achieved a limited and eclectic fame in England as *the* representative French dramatist through Stage Society performances of his later social dramas. Still less did I suspect that Mr. Shaw, of all sane men, would one day attempt the miracle of turning water into wine by devoting an entire preface to praise of this author's translated work. Shaw as prologue to Brieux is indeed a sight for gods and men. The high priest of unsentimentality prostrate before the altar of bathos. The harlequin enamoured of pomposity. Tanner submissive at the heels of Roebuck Ramsden; a revolutionary Roebuck Ramsden brought strictly up-to-date, with twentieth century views on marriage, justice and depopulation. And all this in order to prove that M. Brieux is the most important event in the European Theatre since Ibsen. (O Strindberg, Hauptmann, Tchekhov,

Hofmannsthal, and, above all, Shaw!) The volume in question has not yet appeared, but its brilliance cast an anticipatory shadow in the recent production of "False Gods" at His Majesty's Theatre. "False Gods" was an adaptation of "La Foi." "La Foi" was "a play by Brieux." No initials; not even the non-committal "Monsieur." Simply, magnificently,—Brieux. A catechism for the critics: "Who is Brieux?" "Clearly a personage, a playwright of European repute. For further information apply to Shaw." Thus the path of the dramatic reporter is smoothed. He is able to nod with easy familiarity "Ah yes, of course. . . . . Brieux."

For further information let us turn to his plays. I take "Blanchette" first. Blanchette is a daughter of an innkeeper in a country town. She has just left school, and her certificates and prizes are displayed about the walls of the café. Her parents show them proudly to their customers. But Blanchette does not take kindly to the new work of a barmaid. She sits behind the counter, reading, and when

a labourer stumps in, seats himself and calls for a *bock*, she fails to serve him courteously. The labourer leaves offended. The stern parent appears and compels filial obedience. Blanchette, tearful, conveys the pot of beer to "m'sieur." Then, being a girl of some spirit, she runs away to Paris. According to the traditions of the theatre, any girl who runs away to Paris must be immoral. The parents accept this view, and duly expunge her from their life. They are disgraced in the eyes of their neighbours, but there is a general agreement not to mention Blanchette. In due course she returns, encounters the familiar threatening father, melts her mother's heart, and is finally forgiven by both.

There is the domestic comedy of "Blanchette." The ethics apart, it is quite skilfully and admirably written, for M. Brieux is a good stage craftsman. But consider it as the work of the alleged leading dramatist of France, writing for a revolutionary theatre some years after the appearance of Ibsen, and the dilemma is obvious. If it was sincerely done, then

M. Brieux had nothing in particular to say ; if it was insincerely done, then he was foisting upon the Théâtre Libre a piece of rubbishy theatricality which could have found a home in any one of ten fashionable theatres in Paris. In the light of the later plays, it is impossible to resist the former conclusion. " Blanchette " pointed the way for M. Brieux, and at the same time defined his limitations. Conventional domestic comedy was always his trade, and his social and political views are only window-dressing. There need be no doubt of the sincerity of M. Brieux's opinions, but they are for the most part so trivially expressed that they carry no conviction. In becoming a reformer, he ceased to be an artist.

For proof of this, consider the four-act comedy " Les Bienfaiteurs " (The Philanthropists). The philanthropists are Robert Landrecy, a factory owner, and his wife Pauline. They are not wealthy, but they have acquired a reputation as charitable people, and apparently spend most of their leisure time in uttering vague generalisations upon the subject of benevolence.

Unexpectedly a relative from South Africa, one Valentin Salviat, appears upon the scene. Valentin is a millionaire cynic without any great belief in charity, but he places his fortune at the disposal of Landrecy and Pauline for their schemes. Committees and sub-committees are formed. The poor, deserving and undeserving, are duly classified, and the work of relief begins. The committees quarrel among themselves, and, of course, are swindled right and left by specious applicants. An expert organising secretary, called in to save the situation, goes to the other extreme and refuses aid in every case. The newly-formed society collapses. The dismissal of a workman in Landrecy's factory leads to a strike, and the philanthropists are in despair. The millionaire chuckles over the fulfilment of his prophecy. Landrecy puts an end to the strike by reinstating his dismissed employee, and the comedy comes to an end with the following philosophic gems :—

LANDRECY : And yet I have been charitable.

VALENTIN : No. You have only given

alms—a very different matter. In spite of all your efforts, Landrecy, you have so far awakened no response in the hearts of the people, because the heart only understands the language of love, and that language you have never spoken. But with your first impulse of true charity you disarmed hatred.

LANDRECY: One must love those whom one would relieve!

PAULINE: One must know them and love them.

VALENTIN: Alms must pass from one to another with a clasp of the hand. You must give charity with discernment, Pauline. If not, it does harm. You must give with love, Landrecy; otherwise it is ineffectual. . . .

The banality of this passage makes comment almost unnecessary. Some such string of platitudes must have served Tchekhov as a text when he wrote: "To me the Theatre of to-day is no more than an antiquated prejudice, a dull routine. When the curtain rises, and all these accomplished actors, these priests of a sacred art, attempt to show, by lamplight, in a room with three walls, how ordinary people eat,

drink, love, move about the world; when a morality is preached to us in trivial phrases and pictures, a vulgar, commonplace morality convenient for household use; when the same old story is dished up again and again in a thousand variations; then I can do no otherwise than flee as Maupassant fled from the Eiffel Tower, whose triviality threatened to shatter his soul!"

Observe, however, the most important European dramatist since Ibsen.

I turn to "Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont." This is Brieux's most successful effort at social drama. M. Dupont's three daughters are Caroline, Julie and Angèle. Caroline is an old maid, and a pious Catholic. Angèle is a prostitute in Paris. Julie, when the play begins, is about to be betrothed to Antonin Mairant, a youth of the town. M. and Mme. Mairant pay their ceremonial call upon M. and Mme. Dupont. The four parents haggle about the marriage portion, and succeed in swindling one another to perfection. But Julie, once married, proves intractable. She wants children and Antonin will give

her none. Moreover, the mutual fraud of the dowry is revealed. Antonin treats the matter cynically, and Julie breaks out fiercely with her claims to motherhood, to equality and respect. She has not married him to be made a slave, and she insists upon her rights as an individual. Much of this outburst is effective enough, but Brieux the feuilletonist is not long kept in the background. He asserts himself in wordy commonplace and platitude. One feels with him, as with Sudermann in "Magda" and "Johannisfeuer," that the subject is too big for its author. Julie is only convincing as a feminist tract. There is nothing in her shadowy personality to compel attention and to make her, views and all, inevitably true.

This weakness is all the more glaring in the later passages of the play. So far we have been concerned only with one of the daughters of M. Dupont. The case of the others is just as hard. Caroline wants to be married. She and Angèle together inherit a small legacy. Caroline hands over a part of her share to an inventor, hoping that he will come to her rescue;

but he proves to be already living with a mistress. Caroline, then, remains upon her parent's hands. Angèle (victim, of course, of an early seduction) arrives from Paris; but beyond impressing M. and Mme. Dupont vastly by her prosperous appearance, and lamenting her fate sentimentally, she does nothing in particular. Julie, having left her husband, is persuaded to return to him; and M. Dupont, who "always knew that things would straighten themselves out in the end," contemplates his precious family with resignation.

One further example: the ineffable "Maternité," dedicated to the Society for the Prevention of Depopulation in France. Here the cloven hoof of the feuilletonist-reformer not only comes through, but kicks the drama to pieces most unmercifully. Annette Brignac, daughter of a middle-class family, is seduced by her lover and left with an unborn child. Her father, a pompous politician, has views upon the duty of parentage (legitimate, of course), and is, no doubt, a member of M. Brieux's Society. Two acts are occupied in general discussion of the ethics of social duties

and individual rights in this matter of parentage. In the third and last act it appears that Annette has died as the result of artificially procured abortion, and the woman who performed the operation is put upon her trial for murder. The trial comes to no conclusion, for the counsel for the defence causes a popular outburst by denouncing the seducer, and the judge withdraws from the Court without passing sentence, in order to preserve his dignity. All that emerges is a muddle of flatulent rhetoric and special pleading; and the cause of feminism was never more vilely urged.

Brieux is not the only playwright who has seen the possibilities of exploiting modern social views for the sake of theatrical effect. The case of Sudermann, own brother to him, has already been considered. Both reveal in their work temperaments which make everything that they touch necessarily false. The sincerity or insincerity of their views matters nothing, for drama depends upon personality and treatment rather than upon subject. Sudermann may have believed that in

"Die Ehre" he was revolutionising the conception of honour, and in "Magda" that he was stating a new view of the independence of women; he failed in each case because he created no individual figure who was not trivial. Brieux may have believed that in "Maternité" and "Les Avariés" he was exposing the diseases of modern society with such force that after the publication of his work they could no longer continue to exist; in reality he was only exposing his own bourgeois temperament to the public gaze. There is something almost indecent in this self-revelation; but it is inevitable, and it is the solitary safeguard against the fraud of revolutionary drama which is not revolutionary. One searches in vain through the whole of Brieux's plays for a single memorable figure. Rebecca West and Dr. Stockmann we know; Hilda Wangel and Relling. But who are Valentin Salviat, Julie Dupont and Annette Brignac? Ill-digested scraps of blue-books, manifestoes, Charity Organisation leaflets, members of the Society for Combatting Depopulation in France. Infuse

them with sentimentality, set them upon their feet and bid them walk; and they give you calculated farce, ponderous comedy without the Comic Spirit and pitiful tragedy without a spark of the eternal.

Let us pursue this question of the sham social drama a little further. Platitudes are infectious, and in criticism of M. Brieux I shall not go out of my way to avoid them. It is a platitude, for example, to say that there is no such thing as an impersonal play (although individual authors may approach the impersonal). There is no such thing, in the abstract, as a realistic or romantic method, although each individual author has his own bias. In the same way there is no such thing as an abstract social drama. There is only an individual author's view of life, and that is the beginning and the end of all his work. An understanding of this is vital, because, as the Theatre becomes more and more concerned with ideas, the contrary view may be encouraged. Mr. Barker, for example, recently called for a play upon the Majority and Minority Reports

of the Poor Law Commission, setting forth the dramatic conflict between them; the inference being that if any individual of the necessary ability sat down to study both Government blue-books (which God forbid!) he could in course of time, by applying them to the facts of life, evolve a social masterpiece. It is conceivable that such a play might be written, but, if so, it would not be because the author conceived of life as one large blue Majority Report opposed to another large blue Minority Report, but because his personal distinction as an artist carried him beyond them both into tragical isolation. (Tragical, whatever his treatment of the theme might be.) Moreover, he would be unable to avoid revealing in his work, not only himself, but his method. The more the blue-books, the less the conviction his play would carry.

The case applies very well to M. Brieux. Before he took to the drama of social problems, he was a harmless sentimentalist. Then he felt called upon to move with the times. He issued, in his own person, Majority and Minority reports upon the

social condition of his country, and very naturally he became a successful academic personage. The revolutionary bias in his plays ("Maternité" and "Les Avariés," for example) did him no harm, and indeed commended him to those supporters of the advanced theatre who were incapable of distinguishing between an expression of opinion and a work of art. But he could never escape from himself. The mark of the beast was upon him; the trail of feuilletonism and routine. His writing had the false perfection of commonplace, the superficiality of the social sketch-map, the vocabulary of the leader writer and the pamphleteer, the easy achievement of the author with nothing to say. (I refer the reader once again to the passage from "Les Bienfaiteurs" quoted above.) The whole shallow philosophy of life stood revealed. Society, for M. Brieux, consists of convergent "movements." At some point they meet. He classifies them neatly. Here one view, there another. Philanthropy and true charity ("Les Bienfaiteurs"), law and justice ("La Robe Rouge"), religion and

agnosticism ("La Foi"), marriage and free love ("Les Hannetons"), feminism and anti-feminism ("Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont," "Maternité"). But the convergent forces are only movements, not individuals; and so the common ground upon which they meet is strewn with much rhetoric and little drama.

M. Brieux, then, may be left to those readers and playgoers who must at all costs have their "morality for household use" ready to hand, like yellow soap in the back kitchen. With them there is no disputing, for the question at issue is the eternal one of taste. It is possible that M. Brieux's plays may exercise some ephemeral reforming influence, just as it is possible that a Socialist *Daily Mail* might bring about a temporary revolution, and even probable that a pious *Daily Mail* might create a religious revival. But criticism can have no truck with such factitious effects. The critic, like the dramatist, works by artistic instinct. It is not his part to act as town crier for every municipal councillor with advanced opinion, or to peddle cheap reform from

door to door. There are some playwrights of our time who compel more than the attention of a moment. They stand in that tragical isolation of which I have spoken. They are the night watchmen who cry the hours from age to age. There is mystery in them, because they have always penetrated the darkness a little further than the rest. The black magic of Strindberg in "The Father" or "Intoxication," the passionate music of Hofmannsthal, the ceaseless challenge of Tchekhov, like some sentinel demanding the password of entry into the citadel of art, the intellectual greatness of Shaw in "Man and Superman"—these are qualities which make their authors immune, not from critical survey, but from the clumsy familiarity bred of instant apprehension. One must climb to gain even a glimpse of them. The summits of their work are veiled. There are other authors, like Brieux, who inspire no such respect. Their achievement stands out, unsightly and uninspired, like some jerrybuilt "Smith's Folly" set upon a trivial mound for the mockery of after generations. As

their own time and its immediate problems pass, the very reason for their labour is forgotten. It fails to live because in itself it has no beauty and no individual power. It is only the monument of an unknown dullard.

And the momentary fame? In M. Brieux's case, it depends mainly upon the censorship. Three of his plays have been refused a licence in England; one has been prohibited in France. The record of the English censorship, at least, is sufficiently stupid to justify the presumption that he is therefore a distinguished artist. Mr. Shaw appears in defence of this claim. I have dealt faithfully with it. M. Brieux must be judged upon his merits.

X

BELGIUM AND HOLLAND

MAETERLINCK AND HEIJERMANS

Maeterlinck

The guileless have said that Maeterlinck belongs to no period. This is because they have lost themselves so completely in his mystical forests that they can no longer see the wood of modernity for the trees of illusion. To them his magic is witchcraft. In seeking the source of the rainbow, they have found nothing but mist. Nevertheless, the period claims him. The opportunity of realism comes with the age of false romance. And, in the same sequence, there is a time for magic. It is the hour when all the world is matter-of-fact.

The early eighteen-nineties saw the advanced theatre besieged by social dramatists. They formed a European ring; Ibsen, Strindberg, Tolstoy, Hauptmann, Henri Becque and the authors of

the *comédie rosse*. Their social gospels varied, but they all practised in common the outward technique of realism, with its perfection of modern dialogue and setting. The subject varied, too. Here it was the life of the *bourgeoisie*, there that of the peasantry or the slums. Social politics were touched upon, as in "The Weavers" or "An Enemy of the People." An atmosphere of moral indignation pervaded the stage. Society was "unmasked"; convention was exposed; new moralities were preached. Each author, mounting the realistic steed, set off at a gallop in pursuit of "Truth." And truth was the actual, the existing fact.

This was the destined hour of the magician, and Maeterlinck appeared. The apparition was startling, and some critics, seeking a pompous imbecility to cover their confusion, named him "the Belgian Shakespeare." In this fashion Tchekhov might be named "the Russian Ibsen," or Hugo von Hofmannsthal "the Austrian Dante." Such is the disintegrating force of the new idea upon the mind of the expert labeller.

The originality of the earlier Maeterlinck was marked in three respects; in setting, subject and technique. I take them consecutively.

The setting was at first sight unfamiliar and (to the social politician) reactionary. The peasant cottages and middle-class parlours of the realist drama gave place to dim halls of feudal castles, gloomy mediæval forests and battlefields remote from space and time. The atmosphere was that of a dream-world with the surface ethics of a barbaric age. So far, however, Maeterlinck might be said only to have rediscovered the vessel of the old romance which had lain unused so long.

The subject was more unfamiliar still. Dramatists of all ages had been concerned to lay bare the motive of human action. Even the playwright-manipulator of the market place, endeavouring to conceal the strings he pulled, alleged a motive for his puppets; and the modern realists, challenging the order of society, sought the true motive of actual men and women. Shaw, hurling the thunderbolts of his prefaces at an astonished Anglo-Saxon world, de-

nounced the attempt "to found our institutions upon the ideals suggested to our imaginations by our half-satisfied passions, instead of upon a genuinely scientific natural history." Motive, then, was regarded as a fixed scientific fact, accessible to investigation and exact analysis. It was a definitely adjusted part of the human mechanism. Thus the logical evolutionist, supported by nineteenth century thought. Maeterlinck modified this conception without attempting a frontal assault upon it. He went deeper than the logicians, and sought the source of all motive, the underlying self. Here he was supported by modern psychology, which draws a distinction between the conscious and the sub-conscious ego. He was concerned, however, not with a new scientific form of drama to replace the old, but only with the expression of a temperament. He dramatised the sub-conscious, the subterranean and tremulous in man, called it forth and gave it life. It took the form of the child-spirit, and its dominant trait was ever-present fear. It was awakened at night after the sleep of

centuries, and found the darkness peopled with the unknown. Fate, a malignant horror with lean, clutching hands, hovered in the gloom of the castle hall and crouched behind every tree in the forest, purposing a rape of the soul. Even the blind were conscious of its presence. The children fled before it, seeking to return to their sleep; but every way was barred, and they beat their hands vainly upon heavy iron doors. Such children as Pélléas and Mélisande, Aglavaine and Sélysette.

The technique was newest of all. The sub-conscious mood, hitherto expressed only in music, found words. It became articulate through symbolic speech, repetition, archaism and subtle delicacy of suggestion. Above all, through a perfection of the artless.

This was the service of the earlier Maeterlinck; a notable discoverer.

"Monna Vanna" was the turning-point. In setting, the transition was from the mystical to the historical, from the dimly imagined to the known. The place, Pisa; the period, the close of the fifteenth

century. The roaming symbolist, then, was tethered by his own choice; and, feeling the unfamiliar pull of the imprisoning rope, at each browsing sweep he narrowed his range of liberty still further, ending at last with many plaintive bleats in a tangle of impotence. But of that later.

In subject there was a vaster change. The children had grown up. They were no longer afraid of the dark. They passed from moods to problems, from the midnight dream-world to the high noon of passion, from an atmosphere to a morality. A dictated morality of unheroism, in accord with the "movements" of the age; such a gospel as sparkled in lighter form through the pages of "Arms and the Man." Some of their former characteristics they retained—the half-blindness of Marco, for example—but for the most part they were older and less ingenuous. Yet in growing up they had grown no stronger. Their problems were too great for them. Spoiled children from the first, they became querulous and unmanageable. The reason for this is not far to seek.

The perfect simplicity of the earlier Maeterlinck portrayed each individual as a clearly defined, homogeneous figure, troubled by fate, but yet limpid and serene within. The child-spirit was a complete whole, the grown man a conflicting cosmos. Instinct guided the poet in his native drama of the sub-conscious; it deserted him almost wholly in the drama of action.

In technique, too, there was a lapse. The artless gave place to the artificial, and the old simplicity of speech and form to a covenant with the theatre. The effective thrill of Vanna, naked beneath her cloak in the tent of Prinzivalle, her great stage lie at the close, her all-important "aside" ("Tais-toi . . . je te délivrerai. . . . nous fuirons") at the critical moment, the explanatory speeches of Marco as raisonneur;—these were all commonplaces of the theatrical specialist, but they were foreign to Maeterlinck's genius. Moving in the depths of the child-spirit he had been profound; returning to the surface of life he was—superficial.

Let us look more closely at the figures of this drama. Pisa is beleaguered by the

Florentines and reduced to famine. Guido, husband of Monna Vanna, commands the garrison. The old philosopher Marco, his father, returns from the besieging camp with terms of peace. Marco has been the guest of the Florentine mercenary, Prinzivalle, and has found him no barbarian, as was rumoured, but a man of parts, wise, reasonable and humane. "But where," he asks, "is the wise man without his madness, or the good man who has never harboured a monstrous thought?" Prinzivalle's terms are that Vanna shall go to him at night, naked beneath her cloak, and shall pass the night in his tent; earning thereby the safe entry into Pisa of a convoy with provisions and the raising of the siege. Marco urges his son to accept them: "Do what this madman asks, and the deed which seems to you hideous will seem heroic to those who survive. . . . It is an error to believe that the pinnacle of heroism is to be found only in death. The most heroic act is the most painful, and death is often easier than life." Here is the new morality of reason, linking Maeterlinck with the tendencies of a

period. Guido refuses; but Vanna consents, and goes to Prinzivalle.

Prinzivalle, unknown to Vanna, had loved her in his youth. He talks with her now; they speak frankly as friends. She binds up his wounds, and treats him at moments almost like a mother. The purpose of her coming is barely touched upon. Her speech is half naïve, half yielding. Very simply she expresses her astonishment at being able to speak with him at all, for "Je suis très silencieuse." (What sinuous magic in this word!) Still Prinzivalle forbears to take her; and their conversation is broken by an alarm in the camp. A new detachment of the Florentines has arrived, and Prinzivalle is proclaimed a traitor. Vanna implores him to return with her to Pisa, where he will be received honourably as a guest. She kisses him upon the forehead, and he carries her away in his arms.

Within the city Marco and Guido await them. Here the conventions of the theatre gain the upper hand, and, to borrow a phrase of Prinzivalle, "ce dernier acte est le seul qui ne prouve rien." Vanna

declares that she is unharmed; Guido refuses to believe her. Protestations and incredulity—these are familiar scenes, but they are at least convincing. The unreal triumphs with the recognition of Prinzivalle. Note the gradual lapse into the theatrical rut. Guido believes at first that Vanna has brought him as a victim, to revenge her wrong. She still protests: "He did not touch me." "Why not?" "Because he loves me." Guido is tortured by ignorance, craves for certainty. At all costs he must know the whole truth. Prinzivalle is seized and bound for torture. Vanna rushes into the midst of the guards, crying, "No! I lied! He took me! He is mine!" (Aside to Prinzivalle, "Be silent! I will free you! We will fly together!") Stage psychology ready-made; a wild, clap-trap scene. For the sake of form Guido asks "Why is he here? Why did you lie?" and for the sake of form she answers, "I lied to spare you. . . . I brought him to revenge myself." The play sinks fast, but Vanna's proof touches the depths. She approaches Prinzivalle and embraces him with a

show of hatred. "Thus and thus I kissed him! . . . He is mine! . . . I will have him! . . . He is the trophy of this night of mine!" Prinzivalle is led away. "Adieu . . . We shall meet again!" Then, taking the key of his prison, she goes out alone to set him free. "Ce dernier acte . . . ne prouve rien."

And the ethics? (For "Monna Vanna" has been called an ethical drama.) Accept for the sake of argument the wildly preposterous fact of Prinzivalle's demand. Marco urges a morality of unheroism and sacrifice; but he claims in the same breath that it is based upon the experience of age. He foreshadows a time when sole possession will not be the highest aim of love; but his immediate instance is the prostitution of the beloved to the caprice of a mercenary. Guido commands the garrison; but he allows Vanna to go against his will. Having allowed her to go, he stands upon his honour and refuses to forgive her. Prinzivalle is a philosopher, but yet "a madman." He loves Vanna, but he does not take her. As for Vanna herself, she remains a mystery. (Perhaps

a mystery even to her author.) She loves Guido and treats him almost with contempt; loves Prinzivalle in an instant, and saves him in the next. The last impression of her is the strongest; as the steam of the theatrical machinery in the final act. The motive of an ethical drama of weaklings.

Let us be uncritical for a moment, even towards these spoiled children. It is ill work to be for ever breaking butterflies upon a wheel. And in this "Monna Vanna" there is so much music of speech, so much brave show of colour, so much pure joy of life. There are triumphant moments; as when Prinzivalle draws aside the curtain of his tent, and the fiery towers of Pisa are seen against the sky. These are in part a legacy of past achievement; in part the flame of a fate at its zenith. "Monna Vanna" is a landmark, a monument at the parting of the ways. With the earlier dramas, it traces the history of Maeterlinck the poet. He had himself emerged from the gloom of the forest for the first time; and if he blinked overmuch in the glare of noon, and his

mystical second sight deserted him, that may have been little for him by comparison with the new sense of life and passion. One should not darken the eyes of the poet, as finches are blinded to make them sing more sweetly. He must choose his own surroundings. Only, it is the song that matters to the world, not the singer; and there is one of the riddles of art and life. After "Monna Vanna," Maeterlinck was no longer a discoverer. He became a purveyor of water after wine. But the wine must first be tasted, before the water is thrown away.

Heijermans.

There are playwrights who follow "movements" as street urchins march in step with a military band. Such a ragged group of imitators was attracted by the cry of "naturalism" in the European theatre of twenty years ago; and the more squalid and noisome the district traversed, the larger grew the following. The manufacture of slum drama, indeed, appealed irresistibly to the unemployed mind. The

method was simple. Dirt, poverty and alcohol were the material ingredients. Ever-present dirt supplied the necessary sepia background. Poverty offered the motive for three hours of clutching speculation as to the fortunes of the characters. Alcohol, embracing psychological cause and effect with superb catholicity, assisted the play to stagger forward a few steps when the action threatened to halt; an immemorial stage device. At the same time, it added local colour. Lastly, an infusion of revolutionary thought, borrowed conveniently from a Social Democratic leaflet, provided the all-important "tendency," and enabled the author to flatter himself that he had joined the ranks of the moderns and was delivering a message to his age. Dirt, poverty, alcohol, "tendency,"—there is the content of the factitious slum tragedy, the drama of the street urchin which has cursed the stage of Europe for a generation.

And the characters? I had forgotten them. (It is so easy to forget the characters.) Their part in the affair was comparatively unimportant. They were

determinist puppets, unhappy victims of heredity and environment. Their speech was a dialect, and their function to be mouthpieces of the tendency. Thus they were conceived by their authors, and thus they lived through their brief existence. Their lament completed, they withdrew into a corner and perished modestly in accordance with the programme. This theatrical manœuvre, devoid of form, beauty or inspiration, became known as "realistic tragedy." At best it was only a kinematographic genre picture, at worst a laboured whine.

I write, of course, only of the minor followers of the "movement." The leaders—dramatists like Hauptmann and Strindberg—were concerned with something more than that "realistic method of a conscientious transcription of all the visible, and a repetition of all the audible," which, as Meredith protested, "is mainly accountable for our present branfulness, and for that prolongation of the vasty and the noisy, out of which, as from an undrained fen, steams the malady of sameness, our modern malady." They

perceived more in life than a desert of the actual, and reflected the perception in their work; removing themselves thereby from the region of schools and definitions. That is the distinction of the pioneer. His part is not first to create the inevitable and then to bewail its inevitability, as thousands before him have done, but by his own individual treatment to show a way of escape. Any morbid person can exhibit suffering men and women upon the stage; only the poet can make their suffering tragic.

There remain among the camp followers of modern realist drama some authors whose individuality saves them from becoming lost in the crowd, even though they break no new ground. One of them is the Dutch dramatist Heijermans, a master of the genre picture and (what is rarer among his school) an accomplished stage craftsman. His work has all the familiar characteristics of the older naturalism; dialect speech and a minutely detailed study of proletarian life; a certain intentional coarseness here and there, destined to startle the over-civilised audience

of the city, and perhaps to challenge the censorship; a revolutionary bias, sentimental rather than virile, and much vehement denunciation of society, for the most part ill-expressed; lack of character in the figures eked out with naïve generalisations; but among all these false notes the truer ring of that home-bred philosophy which springs, like folk-song, from everyday action and observation of the common things of life, harvest and full nets of fish, wind and sky and sea, rather than from superimposed politics or opinions. The opinions, indeed, matter little. There are some few people to whom a revolutionary conception becomes real by experience, and who are able at the same time to express their feeling clearly; but from most of the figures of realistic drama such expression comes unconvincingly, in the stilted language of an author who ceases to create in the effort to dictate. Hauptmann understood this dilemma when he wrote "The Weavers"; and although he took the side of the strikers throughout the play, he made the dramatic motive only a blind upheaval, meaningless

to the cold-blooded observer, criminal in the eyes of the "moderate man," foolhardy to the experienced politician, but superb and wonderful as a symbol of an upward striving and a momentary realisation of the common desire.

Heijermans followed him in "Op Hoop van Zegen" (The Good Hope), and reduced the social conflict to banality, while he increased its theatrical force by a firmer technique of construction. The play is named "a sea-piece in four acts," and passes in a Dutch fishing village. A shipowner sends out a leaky trawler, "The Good Hope," knowing her to be unseaworthy (and thereby becomes the villain of the piece). The ship is wrecked in a storm, and husbands, lovers and children are lost. That is all. From the social standpoint a fatal skirmish in the guerilla warfare of exploiters and exploited. The weapons are unfairly chosen, however, and here lies a weakness. The author goes out of his way to say that shipowners are unscrupulous scoundrels, and fishermen their unfortunate victims. The bias contributes nothing to drama, and makes

the tragedy no more impressive. Good ships, as well as bad, may perish in a storm; and for the fisherman the sea itself is the symbol of fate. As one of the characters (forgetful for a moment of denunciation) says: "We take the fish, and God takes us." (The survival of the fittest?) Here is a conception more fruitful of great drama than a passing advantage upon one side or the other in the conflict of employers and employed; and the power of "The Good Hope" rests not in that conflict, one-sided as it is, but in the portrayal of the fishermen themselves at grips with life and death. A boy is dragged away to sea against his will, and is heard of no more except as "Barend Vermeer, aged 19," in the list of the drowned. His brother sinks in the same ship, and leaves a girl with an unborn child. The women and old men huddle together in a cottage fearful of the storm, and tales of the sea are told in the dark; of men overboard torn by sharks, of wrecks on the Dogger Bank, of ships long overdue and months of expectation ending in despair. A gale of wind and

rain whistles through the play, sweeping the decks of life, tossing men out into the unknown. That is the power of Heijermans.

In "Ora et Labora" he turns to the peasantry, starving upon the banks of a frozen canal in winter—a genre picture again, dull grey as a December evening. "I ask," says Hiddes, the old bargee, "why the Lord made the winter. . . . The birds fly away and the beasts burrow . . . . they're better off than men. That's queer. How comes it that the worms sleep and the swallows fly south, while we haven't even a warm room above ground? Why in thunder does the Lord make water and earth as hard as stone?" So the play runs on. There is no work, no warmth, no food. One figure after another comes from the hut or the frost-bound canal with the same lament. The last cow dies of disease in an outhouse, and its throat is cut so that it can be sold to the butcher. The father of the family sells it for a few shillings, and returns home drunk. His son Eelke enlists in the army as a last resort, and binds himself

to colonial service in the West Indies for six years, leaving Sytske, the girl he was to marry. His first month's pay saves the family from the workhouse. Sytske refuses to forgive him, and the old peasants are left squabbling over the money he has brought. Again—that is all. A pitiful story, told as well as may be.

These two plays, with "Ghetto," a tragedy of the Jewish quarter in a Dutch city, contain the best work that Heijermans has done. They reveal no very powerful personality; a kindly disposition but a commonplace intellect; sincere revolutionary conviction without enough creative force to translate it into terms of life; a fine sense of atmosphere, comparable with that of the Dutch masters, but lack of colour; stagecraft without inevitability. In a word, talent without genius. Such a playwright, straggling in the rear, marks the close of a period. He is the last of the naturalists. The main body of the movement he follows is long since dispersed. Tolstoy became a preacher, Strindberg a mystic; Hauptmann and Gorky are lost in byways. Heijermans

still perseveres, but no matter how many leagues he may cover, he can go no further. The world is turning in the opposite direction.

XI

ITALY

D'Annunzio

Given imaginative power, what are the essential conditions of the theatre? Psychology suggested rather than described; descriptive colour arising spontaneously in speech rather than plastered on in elaborate stage directions; impressionism together with good draughtsmanship;—an ever-watchful austerity far removed from the exuberance of the author with a hundred thousand words to spend and a whole language to choose them from; in a word, symmetry extended from form to content; the rhythmic instinct of the lyric poet combined with the verbal economy of the aphorist and the concentration of the painter in miniature.

D'Annunzio is poet, novelist, and playwright together. He has his place in the European chain, not far removed

from Maeterlinck and Hofmannsthal. Recall for a moment the quality which distinguishes these two dramatists (together, perhaps, with Tchekhov) from all the other authors of their time. It is their revolt, conscious or unconscious, against the *bourgeois* theatre, that theatre which is concerned mainly with the social conditions of a period, filled with moral indignation and designed to replace convention by an ethical standard. The theatre, typically, of Björnson, Shaw, Brieux, Heijermans, Hauptmann and Galsworthy. Maeterlinck rehabilitated symbolism. Hofmannsthal, revisiting renaissant Italy, became the leader of the New Romanticists; and his reconstruction of Greek tragedy was in itself an artistic challenge. Tchekhov rebelled against the "morality for household use," and sought in "The Seagull" and "The Cherry Orchard" to remould modern drama by uniting dignity of conception with beauty of stage setting. All three were pioneers. With the gradual decay of modern realism their originality begins to be understood.

There remains the case of D'Annunzio, no pioneer, but a superbly gifted imitator. "Imitator" may be too harsh. He is a magnificent virtuoso, if no composer of symphonies; a great artificer of words, a collector of sensational curios, a conjurer who would pass for a magician, a mixer of glorious colours, a swaggerer in the grand style. Superlatives are his vocabulary. He flings them prodigally right and left, with the air of one who inherits the Latin culture of a thousand years and exults in the mastery of the sweetest language that the world has known. He has no "tendency," no hatred of convention save in speech. A connoisseur of impressions, he calls every art to his aid: sculpture in "Gioconda" and "The Dead City," where a woman suffers mutilation to save a statue, and another is likened to "the Victory unlacing her sandals"; architecture in every pillared setting, in the ruined walls of Mycenæ or the glimpse of San Miniato from a balcony; tragic verse, where two women read aloud from Sophocles and weep together over the death of Antigone;

music in the folk-song of Francesca's playmates; handicraft in the heaped treasures of Greece excavated by Leonardo, and described with the collector's love of old, strange words. (The chords of speech in this passage have the timbre of long-forgotten instruments). Painting, again, in every scene: in the drooping posture of Bianca Maria as she stands upon the loggia steps; in the crushed, bleeding hands of Silvia, like those of some mediæval martyr-saint; in the dead body of Bianca lying by the fountain. All of these are fruits of reminiscence. The achievement of the world is swept for D'Annunzio's writing-table. Then the weaving, the embroidery, the word-painting begin. Most skilfully the impressions are arranged. About the dead city whirls "a tempest of flaming dust." Visions are recalled in flashes. "All the desert of Argos, behind us, was a lake of flame. The mountains were tawny and savage, like lionesses." A "thirsty plain" encircles the ruins. The atmosphere vibrates with heat. Then, in the cool of evening, a change. A description of Bianca: "The

quiver of a thousand wings was in her voice." "The quiver of a thousand wings." A great virtuoso.

There is the first impression of his work. I pause to extricate drama from this tropical profusion of speech. Little can be found. For D'Annunzio, not content with the spoils that he has gathered from the arts, and discovering, naturally enough, that his own gift of word-painting serves only a decorative purpose, has met the demands of the theatre by further borrowing in a meaner quarter. He has propped his structure with two unsteady supports, the one a peculiarly gross form of theatrical sensation, the other a bastard symbolism. Take for example the case of the notorious "Gioconda." A sculptor is dragged this way and that by two women struggling for possession of his soul. Silvia, his wife, is a gentle, saintly creature, who possesses him completely in his calmer moments; Gioconda, his model, is the familiar "panther-woman" of modern drama, sex incarnate, lithe, passionate, dangerous. (I speak of intention only. D'Annunzio says that Gioconda is so

disposed. She herself says so. But she remains unconvincing because she is only a decorative talker with one trapeze act to perform. These are the traps which the theatre lays for the virtuoso.) Gioconda inspires the sculptor's statue ; Silvia nurses him through a long illness. Thus far D'Annunzio offers nothing new in subject or treatment. Many authors before him have dramatised the conflict of saintly devotion and sensual charm. But he has the instinct for sensation—a sensation in superlatives, a monstrous catastrophe—and he arranges a scene between the two women in the studio before the clay symbol of their war. Gioconda the passionate, the revengeful, endeavours to throw the statue to the ground. Silvia rushes to save it, and a struggle takes place behind a curtain. Then a thud, a cry of horror. Gioconda emerges madly and escapes. Silvia comes forward with both her hands crushed into pulp, wrapped in wet cloths that are soaked through and through with blood. The statue has fallen upon them. She staggers, is supported, recovers herself. The inevitable phrase

is spoken: "But—the statue is saved!" Curtain. A sensation for all Europe. D'Annunzio outdoes Pinero. What was Mrs. Ebbsmith's rescue of the Bible from the flames compared with this?

Needless to say, the scene forms the pinnacle of the third act. The fourth, in accordance with the same base tradition, is steeped in sentimentality. It appears that, for some reason unexplained, Gioconda has carried off the sculptor, Silvia is left alone. A new effect is arranged, the convalescent mother without hands embracing her infant child. A double symbolism of martyred love and a mutilated life.

The same symbolic device is used from time to time in "The Dead City," a play of far greater beauty. The blindness of Anna, the "thirsty plain" of Argos, Bianca's hair entangled by chance in Alessandro's ring, the golden pair of scales that lay upon Cassandra's breast—all of these have their part in the tragedy. The atmosphere is more completely rendered. The historian may discover less of Sardou than in "Gioconda," and more of Maeter-

linck; but there is also something of D'Annunzio, something more than words. If all the borrowed plumes can be removed, and all the moods realised with sympathy, it will be found that he is indeed a problem dramatist, not of custom or morality, but of sex itself. He lives, not in the every-day world, but in the exceptional moment. He portrays conditions of high nervous tension without the creative skill to make them develop convincingly. In characterisation, as in drama, he leaps directly from the positive to the superlative without a thought of all that lies between. The *bourgeois* theatre is concerned with problems of conduct and moral conventions; D'Annunzio passes in a flash beyond them to the last analysis of motive. He is meteoric, productive of much dust and little drama. But there is grace in his flight. Even the word-painting is brought, in ecstatic moments, into harmony with the conception of the play. The windy stage directions of "Gioconda," with their sunlight and clouds and rain, convey very little. They belong to the art of the novelist. One is conscious that they are

easily imagined and lightly set down upon the printed page, but seldom realised in the theatre. Then comes an inspiration of genius. Flowers are brought. Some one says, "There is a bee in the room." In a pause, all present listen for its hum. The sand-paper bee in the wings of the stage is unnecessary. Silence is music enough. There *is* a bee in the room. There is more,—all the streaming warmth of spring and the scent of flowers. The bald statements of scenic decoration become real; an atmosphere is created. Such an atmosphere is exhaled by the Dead City and by the gardens of the "Francesca da Rimini." The conjurer is sometimes a magician. He has the will to illusion. Let us be grateful.

XII

A SUMMARY

How far does drama depend upon nationality? It is not easy to disentangle the question from all the prejudice which surrounds it. But if we reject the facile generalisations that every Norseman is sombre, every German stolid, every Frenchman volatile, every Austrian frivolous, every Russian pessimistic, every Italian passionate, every Irishman paradoxically witty, and every Englishman a patch in John Bull's monstrous waistcoat, the foregoing chapters have nevertheless revealed frontier walls which not even the strongest individuality can altogether destroy. The survey of an instant will recall them. Ibsen's men and women belong to the mountains and the fjords. Many of his scenes, from "Brand" to "When we Dead Awaken," are laid upon the heights. Björnson's miraculous pastor

lives in a land of miracles. Strindberg, most cosmopolitan of all by choice, is yet most national by temperament. His historical and saga plays should be read together with the autobiography "Die Entwicklung einer Seele" by all who would understand the Northern spirit. The Germans, from Hebbel to Wedekind, are unmistakably defined. England has paid for her political supremacy in Dublin by the paradox of Irish supremacy in London, with the result that Shaw appears to the Continental mind an anti-national enigma, John Bull gone mad. Had Meredith written for the stage, there would have been a vastly different history to record. Schnitzler represents Vienna to perfection, and Hofmannsthal dips into the same magical well of grace. Tchekhov is an intermediary between East and West, following his star like the Wise Men, an artist pilgrim. So one might envisage them all, from the Scandinavians to D'Annunzio, a group of travellers whose tales are the more welcome because each so clearly has his home. Nationality becomes articulate.

There remains little to be added. I have considered these authors as individuals, and not as leaders of "movements" or disciples of "schools," for only the individual dramatist can make a movement inevitable. Moreover, criticism is not a science, but an art. Its aim is the illumination of essentials rather than the analysis of detail. Relevance may be a greater virtue than completeness, and in this instance I have made it a virtue of necessity. There are many dramatists, from Mr. Synge and the Irish National Theatre to Spain and José Echegaray, who have been passed by with the barest mention, and I shall not attempt to treat them lightly here.

For the rest, the reader must draw his own moral. There is material enough for all who care for the future of the Theatre. Shaw has said very truly that there can be no new art without a new philosophy; and it may be that the observant eye will detect a rent or two in the philosophies of modernity which have served the drama for a covering of late. In ten years' time the deficiency will be clearer, and every

dabbler in ideas will be chuckling on his doorstep, arms akimbo, at the ragged spectacle that once fluttered so bravely against the Philistines. But the next forward movement will be no less strenuous than the last. Let the wise playwright forswear imitation and weave himself a new garment. He will need it in the stormy weather.

XIII

LIST OF PLAYS

In this list of plays by the foregoing authors, the titles of Norwegian, Swedish, and Russian works have been translated into English. The remainder are given in the original language. Where published translations exist they have been recorded. The dates given refer, except where otherwise stated, to the first publication.

Björnsterne Björnson

Between the Battles ...	1858
Limping Hulda	1858
King Sverre	1861
Sigurd Slembe	1862
Mary Stuart in Scotland ...	1864
The Newly Married ...	1864
The Editor	1874
A Bankruptcy	1874
The King	1877
Leonarda	1879
The New System	1879
A Gauntlet	1883
Beyond Human Power ...	1884
Geography and Love ...	1885
Paul Lange and Tora Parsberg...	1898
Laboremus	1901
Dagland	1902
At Storhove	1904
When New Wine Glows ...	1909

"Beyond Human Power" ("Over Ævne") has appeared in English under the title of "Pastor Sang." "A Gauntlet," "Geography and Love," "Laboremus," "The Newly Married Couple," "The New System," "Paul Lange and Tora Parsberg," and "Sigurd Slembe" have also been translated and published.

August Strindberg

1870—1880. THE WANDERER. MEISTER OLOF.

1880—1890. THE SECRET OF THE GUILD. LADY MARGIT. HAPPY PETER.

1880—1890. *Naturalistic Plays*: THE FATHER. COMRADES. THE PEOPLE OF HEMSÖ. THE KEYS OF HEAVEN.

„ *Eleven One-act Plays*: MISS JULIA. CREDITORS. A PARIAH. SIMOON. THE STRONGER WOMAN. THE BOND. PLAYING WITH FIRE. BEFORE DEATH. THE FIRST WARNING. DEBIT AND CREDIT. MOTHER LOVE.

1890—1900. TOWARD DAMASCUS. (*In three parts.*) DELIRIUM. THE DANCE OF DEATH. ADVENT. EASTER. MIDSUMMER.

1890—1900.	*Historical Plays:* *Swedish:* FOLKUNGER-SAGA. ENGELBRECHT. GUSTAV WASA. ERICH XIV. GUSTAV ADOLF. *German:* THE NIGHTINGALE OF WITTENBERG.
1900—1910.	*Dramatic Types and Sketches:* QUEEN CHRISTINA. KARL XII. GUSTAV III.
,,	*Legendary and Dream-plays* (*Buddhist and Early Christian*): THE CROWN BRIDE. SWAN WHITE. PHANTASMAGORIA.
,,	*Chamber Plays:* SHEET LIGHTNING. THE HEARTH. THE PHANTOM SONATA. THE FUNERAL PYRE.
,,	*Plays in Verse* (*Lyrical Phantasies*): ABU CASEM'S SLIPPERS. CHRISTMAS. THE GREAT HIGHROAD.

All the above plays have been translated into German. A translation of "The Father" has

been published in England, and several other plays, among them "Creditors," "Simoon," and "The Stronger Woman," have been performed. A number of the shorter pieces have appeared in American periodicals.

Hermann Sudermann

Die Ehre	1889
Sodoms Ende...	1891
Heimat	1893
Die Schmetterlingsschlacht	1895
Das Glück im Winkel ...	1896
Morituri (Fritzchen, Teja, Das Ewig-männliche) ...	1897
Johannes	1898
Die Drei Reiherfedern ...	1899
Johannisfeuer	1900
Es Lebe das Leben	1902
Der Sturmgeselle Sokrates	1903
Stein unter Steinen ...	1905
Das Blumenboot	1905
Rosen (Die Lichtbänder, Margot, Der Letzte Besuch, Die Ferne Prinzessin).	1907
Strandkinder...	1910

"Es Lebe das Leben" ("The Joy of Living"), "Heimat" ("Magda"), and "Johannes" ("John the Baptist") have been published in English translation. "Das Glück im Winkel" ("The Vale of Content") and "Johannisfeuer" ("Midsummer Fires") have been performed by Miss Horniman's theatre in Manchester. Several of the remaining plays have been given in England and America.

Gerhart Hauptmann

Vor Sonnenaufgang... ...	1889
Das Friedensfest	1890
Einsame Menschen	1891
De Waber (*original edition*) ...	1892
Die Weber	1892
Kollege Crampton	1892
Der Biberpelz	1893
Hanneles Himmelfahrt ...	1895
Florian Geyer	1896
Die Versunkene Glocke ...	1897
Fuhrmann Henschel ...	1898
Schluck und Jau	1899
Michael Kramer	1900
Der Rote Hahn	1901
Der Arme Heinrich... ...	1902
Rose Bernd	1903
Elga	1905
Und Pippa tanzt !	1906
Die Jungfern von Bischofsberg...	1907
Kaiser Karls Geisel ...	1908
Griselda	1909
Die Ratten	1911

"Das Friedensfest" ("The Coming of Peace"), "Einsame Menschen" ("Lonely Lives"), "Die

Weber" ("The Weavers"), "Hanneles Himmelfahrt" ("Hannele"), and "Die Versunkene Glocke" ("The Sunken Bell") have been translated into English and published. The first three have also been performed by the Stage Society. "Der Biberpelz" ("The Thieves' Comedy"), "Hannele," and "The Sunken Bell" have frequently been given in England and America.

Frank Wedekind

Der Kammersänger	1900
Marquis von Keith	1901
So ist das Leben	1902
Die Büchse der Pandora ...	1904
Frühlings Erwachen ...	1905
Totentanz	1906
Der Liebestrank	1907
Die Junge Welt	1907
Erdgeist	1907
Musik	1908
Oaha	1908
Die Zensur	1908
Hidalla	1908
Der Stein der Weisen ...	1909

A translation of "Der Kammersänger" was produced by the Stage Society in 1907, and an English version of "Frühlings Erwachen" ("The Awakening of Spring") has been published in America.

Bernard Shaw

Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant:

Widowers' Houses ...	1898
The Philanderer ...	
Mrs. Warren's Profession	
Arms and the Man	
Candida	
The Man of Destiny	
You Never Can Tell	

Three Plays for Puritans:

The Devil's Disciple	1901
Cæsar and Cleopatra	
Captain Brassbound's Conversion	

Man and Superman 1903

John Bull's Other Island	1907
How He Lied to her Husband	
Major Barbara ...	

The Admirable Bashville
(*first performed* 1903)

The Doctor's Dilemma
(*first performed* 1906)

Getting Married
(*first performed* 1908)

THE SHEWING-UP OF BLANCO POSNET
(*first performed* 1909)
PRESS CUTTINGS 1909
MISALLIANCE
(*first performed* 1910)
THE DARK LADY OF THE
SONNETS 1910

Granville Barker

The Weather Hen (*with Berte Thomas, unpublished*)	1899
Prunella (*with Laurence Housman*)	1906
Three Plays:	1909
The Marrying of Ann Leete (1902)	
The Voysey Inheritance (1905)	
Waste (1907)	
The Madras House (*produced in* 1910)	1911

John Galsworthy

Three Plays 1909
THE SILVER BOX (1906)
JOY (1907)
STRIFE (1909)
JUSTICE 1910

Arthur Schnitzler

Das Märchen	1895
Anatol	1895
Liebelei	1896
Freiwild	1897
Das Vermächtnis	1899
Drei Einakter: (Der Grüne Kakadu, Paracelsus, Die Gefährtin) ...	1899
Der Schleier der Beatrice	1900
Lebendige Stunden: (Lebendige Stunden, Die Frau mit dem Dolche, Die Letzten Masken, Literatur)	1902
Reigen	1903
Der Einsame Weg	1904
Zwischenspiel	1905
Der Ruf des Lebens ...	1906
Marionetten: (Der Puppenspieler, Der Tapferer Cassian, Zum Grossen Wurstel) ...	1906
Komtesse Mizzi	1909
Der Junge Medardus ...	1910

"Liebelei" ("Light o' Love"), "Literatur," and "The Farewell Supper" have been performed in English translation. Other short pieces have appeared in English and American journals.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal

Gestern	1891
Der Tod des Tizian... ...	1892
Der Tor und der Tod ...	1893
Der Kaiser und die Hexe ...	1895
Das Kleine Welttheater ...	1897
Das Bergwerk in Falun ...	1897
Die Frau im Fenster ...	1899
Die Hochzeit der Sobeïde...	1902
Der Abenteurer und die Sängerin	1902
Elektra	1904
Das Gerettete Venedig ...	1905
Ödipus und die Sphinx ...	1906
König Ödipus (*translation of Sophocles*)	1910
Christinas Heimreise (*prose*)	1910

The "Elektra" forms the libretto of Richard Strauss's opera, and it has also been performed in an English translation by Mr. Arthur Symons. No translations of the other plays have as yet been published.

Leo Tolstoy

THE POWER OF DARKNESS (*first performed* 1888).

FRUITS OF CULTURE (*first performed* 1889).

THE FIRST DISTILLER (*only performed privately*).

THE CORPSE (*unpublished*).

The first three plays are published in an English translation by Mr. and Mrs. Aylmer Maude. "The Power of Darkness" was given by the Stage Society in 1904, and "Fruits of Culture" by the students of Birmingham University in 1909. "The Corpse" has not yet been translated.

Maxim Gorky

The Middle Class	1901
A Night Shelter	1902
A Country House	1903
Children of the Sun ...	1905
Barbarians	1905
Fiends...	1906
The Last	1908
Odd People	1910

"A Night Shelter" was given by the Stage Society in 1903 under the title of "The Lower Depths." None of these plays have been published in England, but all of them have appeared in Germany, and, with the exception of "Odd People" and "The Last," also in France.

Anton Tchekhov

Ivanov...	1892
The Three Sisters	1899
The Seagull	1900
The Cherry Orchard ...	1904

Shorter Pieces (*in collected edition*):

The Bear.
A Proposal of Marriage.
Uncle John.
Lebedin's Song (Calchas).
Against his Will.

None of the above plays have been published in English. A translation of "The Seagull" has been performed by the Scottish Repertory Theatre in Glasgow.

Henri Becque

MICHEL PAUPER 1871
LA NAVETTE 1878
LES HONNÊTES FEMMES ... 1880
LES CORBEAUX 1882
LA PARISIENNE 1885

In the Théâtre Complet (*three volumes*) :

SARDANAPALE, LE DÉPART, L'ENFANT PRODIGUE, L'ENLÈVEMENT.

LES POLICHINELLES (*unfinished*).

Alfred Capus

Brignol et sa Fille ...	1895
Rosine	1898
La Bourse ou la Vie ...	1901
La Veine	1902
Les Deux Écoles	1903
Les Maris de Léontine ...	1903
La Châtelaine	1904
La Petite Fonctionnaire ...	1904
L'Adversaire...	1904
Notre Jeunesse	1904
Petites Folles	1905
M. Piégois	1905
Les Passagères	1906
Les Deux Hommes	1908
Qui Perd Gagne	1908
L'Oiseau Blessé	1909
Un Ange	1910

François de Curel

L'Amour Brode	1893
L'Invitée	1893
Le Repas du Lion	1898
La Nouvelle Idole	1899
Les Fossiles	1900
La Fille Sauvage	1902
Le Coup d'Aile	1906

"La Nouvelle Idole" ("The New Idol") was given by the Stage Society in 1902.

Eugène Brieux

Ménages d'Artistes... ...	1893
Blanchette	1894
La Couvée	1895
L'Engrenage...	1895
La Rose Bleue	1896
Les Bienfaiteurs	1897
L'Évasion	1897
L'École des Belles-Mères	1898
Le Berceau	1898
Résultat des Courses ...	1898
Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont	1899
Les Remplaçantes	1900
La Robe Rouge	1901
La Petite Amie	1902
Les Avariés	1902
Maternité	1904
L'Armature	1905
Les Hannetons	1906
La Française...	1907
Simone	1908
M. de Réboval	1908

La Foi 1909
Suzette 1910
In collaboration : La Déserteuse, Bernard Palissy.

"Maternité" has been published in English. "Les Bienfaiteurs" ("The Philanthropists"), "Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont," "Maternité," and "Les Hannetons" have also been performed by the Stage Society. A version of the last-named play, under the title of "The Incubus," has been given by Mr. Laurence Irving. "False Gods," an adaptation of "La Foi," was produced in 1909 at His Majesty's Theatre. "La Robe Rouge" has also been adapted. Several of the remaining plays have been performed in America.

Maurice Maeterlinck

La Princesse Maleine ...	1890
L'Intruse	1890
Les Aveugles	1890
Les Sept Princesses ...	1891
Pélléas et Mélisande ...	1892
Alladine et Palomides ...	1894
La Mort de Tintagiles ...	1894
Intérieur	1894
Aglavaine et Sélysette ...	1896
Monna Vanna	1902
Joyzelle	1903
Sœur Béatrice	1907
Ardiane et Barbe-Bleue ...	1907
L'Oiseau Bleu	1909
Maria Magdalène	1910

All the above plays have been published in English. "Intérieur," "The Death of Tintagiles," and "Monna Vanna" have been performed by the Stage Society. "Pélléas and Mélisande," "Aglavaine and Sélysette," and "The Blue Bird" have also been given in England.

Hermann Heijermans

Dora Kremer...	1893
Fleo	1894
'n Jodenstreek?	1894
Ahasuerus	1894
Ghetto	1899
Het Zevende Gebod ...	1900
Op Hoop van Zegen... ...	1901
Het Pantser...	1902
Ora et Labora	1903
Shakels	1904
Allerseelen (*in German*) ...	1906
Wat niet Kon	1908

"The Ghetto" has been published in English. "Op Hoop van Zegen" ("The Good Hope") and "Shakels" ("Links") have been played by the Stage Society.

Gabriele D'Annunzio

La Citta Morta	1898
La Gloria	1899
La Gioconda	1899
Francesca da Rimini ...	1902
La Figlia de Iorio	1904
La Fiaccola Sotto il Moggio	1905
Più che l'Amore	1907
La Nave	1908
Fedra	1909

"Gioconda," "Francesca da Rimini," and "The Dead City" ("La Citta Morta") have been published in English.

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